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BEN CRAMER

WORKING JEWELLER

STELLA AUSTIN

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PAGE 48.

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STELLA AUSTIN,

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Dedication.

TO EIGHT CHILDREN:

BERNARD, ARCHIE,
HARRY, JANIE, FREDDY,
BERTIE, ETHEL, NELLY.

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BEN CRAMER:

WORKING JEWELLER.

CHAPTER I.

"THIS LITTLE PIG WENT TO MARKET."

"THERE'S actually a boy at work with a needle and thread! I never saw such a thing in my life. I must tell the Governor about it when I go home."

The boy astride upon the top of the stone wall looked down upon the boy and girl sitting underneath it. They were both of them sewing as fast as they could, snipping, pulling out, patting down as gravely and as earnestly as though they were a couple of first-rate dressmakers, or rather, as if she were a first-rate dressmaker, and he the man-milliner Worth, the man you know who arranges the dresses of all the grand ladies of Paris.

If Sydney Reid was astonished at them, they were equally astonished when, startled by the sound of his voice, they looked up and saw *him*—a big boy in a

white nankeen suit, with a hat like a *helmet*, a peak in front and a peak behind—he was swinging a large basket in one hand, and switching a short whip in the other. Nothing very wonderful in him you will say, but then visitors of any kind were very rare at Villa Selvóso; the only visitors the brother and sister ever had were the little bare-legged and bare-footed Italian boys in their many-coloured rags. The Villa Selvóso stood upon the brow of a hill, and these little Italians lived in the valley below. Every evening they would climb to the top of the hill, then upon the wall, show their dark faces, bright eyes, and gleaming teeth above it, then drop down and roll themselves from the top of the hill to the bottom, screaming all the time with intense delight. Sometimes they would allow themselves to be coaxed into the garden to play with the brother and sister, but often they pretended to be shy, and contented themselves with a mischievous peep from the top of the wall, then a shrill scream, then that exciting roll, and there they were in the valley below. A breathless scramble up the hill, and the same was repeated over and over again.

This boy was not an Italian, for he talked most decided English with a voice clear and distinct as a bell, and it was the sound of this English speech which they so seldom heard out of doors that caused the girl to give such a jump that she ran the needle into her finger, and made the boy look up so quickly that *his* needle

snapped in two, his work fell upon the ground, and a bright colour flushed his cheeks, but he did not try to hide his work away as though he were ashamed of it.

The three stared at each other for a minute, Sydney thoughtfully, the boy and girl amazedly.

Sydney was the first to break silence.

"What queer little kids you are," he said, bringing his other leg slowly over the wall; "I am coming down to talk to you—may I?"

"Oh yes," the pair answered in a breath. Then feeling that this visit was different to those the Italian peasant boys paid them in the evening, the boy added politely, "Would you like to come in and see our Aunts?"

"Not to-day, thank you," answered Sydney, "I am in a hurry this morning. Another time I'll come in and pay my respects to your Aunts, if I may. Do you live with them?"

"Yes," said the boy, and the two together whispered in low, hushed tones,

"Father and Mother are dead."

"Poor little atoms," said Sydney softly. "*My* Mother is dead too. She died when I was a youngster about your age I should think. By the by, what *is* your age?"

"I am just turned nine," said the boy, "and Dodo will be eight next Tuesday."

"Is that her name?" asked Sydney. "Why, a dodo is a *bird*."

"*Is it*," cried the two eagerly; "what sort of a bird?"

"He stands on one leg, and he's something like a *stork*," replied Sydney. "But I am not quite sure about him—perhaps he is not a real bird at all. Ah, I know now what I was thinking of. It was that picture in 'Alice in Wonderland,' where the Dodo gives the presents. He is standing on one leg to give the thimble, and he is saying, 'Accept this elegant thimble.' I'll ask Willie whether it is a real bird or not, he is safe to know, and then I can tell you. Why on earth did you call your sister *Dodo*?"

"Dorothy is such a long name," replied the boy, "and I call her Dodo for short. But the Aunts call her Dorothy—don't they, Dodo?"

"Yes," said Dodo, "except sometimes Aunt Fluff calls me Dodo, but not often."

"Aunt *Fluff*," echoed Sydney. "Well, you seem to go in for outlandish names in this part of the world, and no mistake. What is *Fluff* the short for?"

"*Flora*," said Dodo, laughing at Sydney's queer face.

"We came to stay for a month," said Sydney, "and we have only been here a week. So, as I shall be likely to drop in upon you pretty often, we had better make friends. My name is Sydney Reid. Here, Dodo, let us shake hands. Now, old man, it is your turn," he continued. "But I don't know your name yet—what is it?"

"Bors Hardcastle," answered the boy.

"*Well*," said Sydney despairingly, "here's a girl with the name of a bird, a lady with the name of a dog, and a boy—with a name like nothing that I have ever heard before."

"It belonged to a man who lived a long time ago," began Bors.

"Oh, then it's a *real* name, not a make-believe, or short for anything?" said Sydney quickly.

Bors nodded. "It's a *real* name, and belonged to a real man," he said proudly. "He was one of our family, and he lived ever so long ago in the reign of Richard I. He did such a lot of brave things. Father used to tell me about them, only I was little then, and I've forgotten them. Dodo and I were born at the Cape, and Father was badly hurt in a fight. He died from the wound they gave him, and Mother was ill at the time, and it made her much worse, and she died almost directly after."

"Poor little kids," repeated Sydney. "Is that all you remember about them?"

"No," said Bors, "not quite all. I remember going in to say 'good-bye' to Father, and he kissed me, and then he patted me on the head"—Bors's voice grew somewhat husky—"and then he said, 'Be a brave boy, and take care of your mother,'—he did not know poor Mother was to die soon after."

"And when Mother kissed us," said Dodo, "she

whispered to both of us, 'Be good children.' What does it mean to be good and brave?"

"*I* think they mean the same," said Bors, nursing his right leg thoughtfully, "only good is for girls and brave for boys. Don't you think they do? Dodo and me often talk about it, and wonder what they mean."

"To be brave is to be *plucky*," began Sydney.

"What is that?" asked the two eagerly.

"Not to be afraid of anything," replied Sydney; "and to be good means—well, I should think if you do what your Aunts tell you, that would be being good children."

"The Aunts never tell us to do nothing," said Dodo rather plaintively, "except to amuse ourselves and not go in the sun because of spoiling our 'plexions. And that is why we always come here."

They were sitting in a small grove of orange trees planted close together, the boughs interlacing and twining so that they formed a thick leafy roof through which the sun could not penetrate. The orange trees gave out a most delicious scent, for they were in full blossom.

"You couldn't get a nicer place than this," said Sydney, sniffing; "it's so jolly and cool, and it smells so sweet, and by stretching out your neck you catch a sight of the tops of the hills yonder."

"*You* can, because you are tall," said Bors, "but we have to get on to the top of the wall when we want to see anything. When we are stiff with sitting at work

we climb on to the wall and look at the hills and the people in the valley down below."

"Ah! that reminds me that I want you to explain *why* you work—it is such an odd idea for a boy, you know. I never saw anything so uncommonly rum, and your needle went in and out so quick as though you were quite used to it."

"So I am," said Bors sagely; "I always mend my own clothes, and Dodo mends hers. Once we made two blouses between us, but that was when Nanna was here, and she cut them out. Carlina can't cut out things. We have to work very hard, for our clothes are getting so old they are almost tumbling off our backs—they want such a *lot* of mending. Sometimes they take us the whole day working hard—don't they, Dodo?"

Dodo nodded, and gave a little sigh.

"But then *why* do you do it?" repeated Sydney. "Wouldn't Carlina, whoever she is—isn't it her *place* to mend your clothes for you?"

"Oh no," said Bors, shaking his head wisely; "she's got all the work of the house to do—she hasn't any time. We are obliged to mend them, or they wouldn't hold together, they are getting so old and shabby; and we couldn't go about in rags and tatters, you know, like the little Italians from the valley who come to see us every evening."

"Got an appearance to keep up. I understand," said Sydney, "but it's a rum state of affairs."

"Dodo," said Bors, gravely addressing his sister, "something bad has happened. When *he* spoke"—with a little wave of the hand towards Sydney—"he made me jump so—"

"He made me jump," interrupted Dodo, "and prick my finger."

"Ah, but you didn't break your needle," said Bors seriously, "and mine has broken right in two."

"Oh, Bors!" said Dodo, with a scream of dismay; "what *shall* we do?"

"What a shindy over nothing at all!" broke in Sydney, seeing to his surprise tears in the eyes of Dodo, and *very* near to those of Bors. "What would the Governor say if I told him I had seen a boy and girl cry because they had broken a needle!"

"*I* am not crying," and Bors's cheeks flushed until they were as scarlet as the poppies in the fields in the valley below; "but it's something to cry about when you have only two needles in the world, and you have broken one of them. When Nanna went away she left us all her working things."

Bors waved his hand over the flower-strewn grass, and Sydney took note of a large gray basket turned topsy-turvy, without handles and without a cover; a pair of scissors the size of a fair-sized pair of garden-shears; several skeins of gray and brown darning-cotton; a tattered needle-book lying on its back, noticeable for its want of needles; a fat pin-cushion full of pins, both black

and white; a tangled mass of sewing silks of every shade and hue; some coarse black and white thread, a few dozen linen buttons, three or four pieces of tape, and a bodkin.

"We had a lot of needles then," Bors continued, "but one by one we've broken them, until we had only two left; and just now, when you made me jump, my last went snap! That leaves us only one and a half." And he held up the half of a very coarse needle, which he had kept tightly grasped in his hot hand.

"What ever shall we do?" said Dodo. "Carlina hasn't got any, I know, for she borrowed ours yesterday."

"We must use the one needle turn-and-turn about," replied Bors. "It will take us ever so much longer to mend our clothes, but it can't be helped."

"The Aunts will give you needles by the dozen if you ask them," suggested Sydney. "Ladies always have their workboxes crammed with needles."

"The Aunts haven't got any at all," said Bors. "Somehow their clothes don't seem to want mending. And if they catch their dresses on a nail and tear them, Dodo sews them up, or I do. And now," he went on somewhat tragically, but with a good deal of fun in his voice, and sticking the *whole* needle into the skin of his forefinger, and holding the stumpy half upright beside it, "one needle and a half-needle are all the needles to be found belonging to the people who live in the Villa Selvóso."

Sydney laughed. He was lying lazily upon his back, enjoying the coolness of the grove, and utterly regardless how the time was flying.

"I tell you what," he said; "you need not fret over your broken needles. I'll get Bella to give you a cart-load, and bring them with me to-morrow."

"Oh, *thank* you," said Dodo gratefully. "We don't want a cart-load; we shouldn't know where to put them. But we should like *some* so very much."

"Hurrah!" shouted Bors, standing on his head and waving his heels triumphantly in the air.

"That's right," said Sydney approvingly. "Then you haven't forgotten how to be a boy, though you work like a girl. I must say it is awfully jolly here, and I wish I could stop, but it strikes me that if I have to get to the market to-day I had better start at once."

"Are you going to walk to Florence?" inquired Bors, who had returned to his natural position.

"No," said Sydney, "the Governor's afraid of the sun. He made me promise to have a mule, not because of my complexion, for that's seen its best days long ago, and now 'it is warranted to wash and wear like a rag.' But the Governor is afraid of a sun-stroke."

"Who is the Governor? You talked about him before?" inquired Bors.

"It would be odd if I didn't talk about him, considering he is my Father," was Sydney's answer.

"I thought he was your schoolmaster," said Bors.

Sydney burst out laughing. "You are the two rummest little kids. I suppose it is because you've been shut up here, and seen nothing of the world."

"We go to Florence sometimes," said Bors proudly. "About once every fortnight. And then we see the world."

"We start early in the morning, and don't come home until the evening," put in Dodo.

"Did you come straight here from the Cape?" asked Sydney.

"Yes," answered the two together.

"I should like you to come and spend the day with me, and then you'll see the Governor," said Sydney. "We don't live far from here."

"Have you taken a house?" said Dodo.

"No," answered Sydney, with a comical smile. "We are on a visit. I am in the same box with you, for I have never been to England. We are on our way there, by slow degrees, and if we like it, we mean to pitch our tent, and stop there."

"We *thought* you were English," said Bors and Dodo, in such disappointed voices, and Sydney hastened to add, "I call myself English. You see the Governor is English, but my mother was an American. I was born in New York, and I've lived there ever since; that is, until a year ago, when we began to travel for the Governor's health."

"I *wish* we could go to England," said Bors, sighing.

"Uncle Jack lives there, and he has written for us to go to him."

"Then why don't you?" asked Sydney.

"The first time Uncle Jack wrote," said Bors, "the Aunts said they would go, and we packed up our things, and the waggons came to the door for the luggage, and then Aunt Fluff wasn't ready."

"You could have waited for her," suggested Sydney.

"But when she was ready, she said it was too hot to travel," said Bors. "Then Uncle Jack wrote, and begged us to come again. We all began to pack, and then Aunt Hessie had a cold, and we've stayed here ever since."

"Better luck the third time," said Sydney cheerfully. "Now I must really say, 'Bye-bye,' I ought to have said it long ago,"—he vaulted on to the wall. "Ah! I am sure there are Bella and Willie yonder."

Bors and Dodo eagerly scrambled upon the wall, but did not see much for their pains—only two figures in the far distance, both bending low to the ground.

"What are they doing?" asked Bors.

"*Grubbing*," answered Sydney briefly. "I don't mean eating, but the other sort of grubbing. Willie is a botanist, and he and Bella do nothing but grub the whole day long. It is quite sickening to stay with them, and Bella was such a nice girl before she got engaged. She took an interest in things you told her. She was the Governor's ward, and she lived with us until she married.

They have taken a house here for six months, and this is the first visit we have paid them."

"Do you like it?" inquired Bors.

"I like it well enough," said Sydney. "It's a change from New York, but Bella doesn't look after the Governor enough to please me. I always kept house at home, even after Bella came to live with us, and I've got the Governor's likes and dislikes at my fingers' ends, of course. And he isn't the same as a strong person, you know. He ought to have his fancies studied. And Bella thinks of nobody but Willie. I am always pitching into her, but it doesn't do much good. I asked her to let me go marketing this morning instead of her, for she never trusts to these foreign servants, they don't understand English people's ways, and she said she was very glad; it gave her more time for grubbing. So perhaps she'll let me do it every morning so long as I am here. I enjoy it; for I see the world, and take care that the Governor gets what he likes best for his dinner. Now I must choose a mule that will step out pretty briskly, or I shall never reach Florence and home again. The Governor will think I am lost. Bye-bye again, you children."

"Come soon," said Bors.

"Don't forget the needles please," said Dodo anxiously.

"All right," answered Sydney, and raced to the bottom of the hill, almost as quickly as the little peasant children rolled down, pulling himself up against a tree which

stood a few paces off on the level ground, and seemed as if it were placed there on purpose to check people in their downward course.

He looked back at the grove he had just left, and saw the two little figures perched still upon the wall; two large straw hats turned in his direction.

He took off his helmet and waved it in the air, and was answered by the two straw hats, while a sound of hurrahing broke upon his ear.

He gave a lusty shout, and feeling the time would bear with no further trifling, hurried off to find the man who had the mules for hire.

CHAPTER II.

PLOTTINGS IN THE GROVE.

IF you had seen Bors and Dodo you would have been inclined to echo Sydney's expression, and think to yourself, if you were too polite to say it out loud, "What a couple of queer little creatures."

Both of them were short and sturdy, the shape of their faces square and sensible, their mouths large and wide. As neither of them had any complexions of which to boast, perhaps the sun had already spoiled them. Dodo's hair curled in short natural curls over her head. It was the same colour as her brother's, too light to be brown, not golden enough to earn the name of "fair." Bors had two peculiarities—his hair stuck up over his head in the most absurd manner, and no amount of brushing would ever coax it to lie flat. Then Dodo's eyes were of an ordinary brown colour, but Bors's eyes were very strange ones. Looking at them close they

were almost amber in colour, clear as crystal, but the lashes which shaded them were so long and thick and dark that at a distance they were the deepest duskiest brown. They were the only beautiful feature in his face those eyes, and they were most beautiful and most uncommon.

There was an unlikeness to ordinary children in the brother and sister which Sydney had been quick to spy out. Perhaps it was their unusual bringing up which gave them this quaintness, but I think their clothes had also something to do with it. They were patched and mended and darned until it was as Bors said, "they seemed hardly to hold together." The only new things about them were their *hats*, and those they could have had by the dozen if they had chosen. Many of the people in the valley below earned their daily bread by platting straw and making it into hats, and they were always ready to offer Bors and Dodo new hats whenever they wanted them.

It was four years now since Bors and Dodo had come to live with their Aunts at Villa Selvóso. It was distant a few miles from Florence, the loveliest town in the lovely land of Italy, and was situated upon the brow of a hill. One behind the other, so far as you could see, rose hill upon hill, some of them covered with beautiful spreading chestnut-trees, and then last of all towered the mighty Apennine, his brow, as a giant's, raised high above his fellows. These hills in themselves were a

fairyland to Bors and Dodo. The clouds played such antics with the tops of them—circled round, wreathed themselves about, gathered together, then separated off into all manners of curious shapes and forms, and from out of them came things enough to furnish materials for books upon books of fairy stories. There were grey stone castles, and dim, black caverns, sea-green dragons rising from a misty uncertain sphere, but with nothing undecided about the tips of their tails, which were a fiery, undaunted red. Then came brave rose-coloured knights to the rescue of gentle white maidens who stood clad in shadowy raiment upon the tops of the turreted castles, and over whose heads hung big dark-hued birds, seeming ready to swoop down upon them and carry them off. Then the scene shifted in an instant, and the castle turrets lengthened into church steeples so slim and slender, that it was as if the lightest breath would shiver them into atoms. This was the end of that one story, for inside that church the lovely maidens were rewarding their brave knights by giving themselves to them in marriage. But when one story ended another began, and Bors and Dodo found ever-changing amusement near the hour of sunset in watching, perched upon their stone wall, the endless shifting of the clouds, and the stories they brought in their train.

Aunt Hessie and Aunt Fluff had come to Italy some years before the children had joined them there. It was

for the benefit of the health of an invalid sister that they had taken up their abode at Villa Selvóso. After her death they intended to return to England, but they had lingered on month after month, year after year, until it almost appeared as if they meant to settle there, as Bors and Dodo expressed it, "for good and all."

And latterly Uncle Jack had been writing such beseeching letters, that Bors and Dodo wondered the Aunts could ever resist them. "I am so lonely," he said in his last letter, "do come at once with the children. The house is so dull at night, and when I eat my dinner I sometimes put chairs round the table, and imagine all of you are sitting in them. Why don't you come? If I could spare the time I'd run over and fetch you. But I can't,—I have a great deal of work on hand, and I must not take a holiday just now."

After this letter had been read aloud, in Aunt Hessie's lowest and slowest and softest voice,—her voice was always low and soft,—the children could talk of nothing else. They were so sorry for Uncle Jack in his loneliness, and they longed for wings to fly across the sea and comfort him. If only they had wings they would spread them at once, get to England in a very short time, fly in at the window of Uncle Jack's house,—and then, what a surprise for him, when he came home at night, to find two of the vacant chairs occupied!

"We would never leave him again," cried Dodo.

"We should have to go to school," said Bors wisely.

"We could have lessons at home," said Dodo.

"It wouldn't be the same thing," answered Bors.

"I *wonder* why the Aunts won't go?" mused Dodo.

They wondered about it, and talked it over so often, that they grew like a pair of half-broken-in ponies champing the bit and pawing the ground in their impatience to be off.

"How do you get to England?" asked Dodo the evening of the day when Sydney appeared upon the scene.

"You go part of the way by train, and part of the way by sea," answered Bors. "I asked Carlina, she said I was always teasing her about something, and she couldn't think what had come over us lately, we had got so restless, we were not like the same children. But I made her tell me."

"It is no wonder we are restless when we think of Uncle Jack," said Dodo, sentimentally, "with all those empty chairs in front of him, and no one to fill them."

"And expecting us every day," said Bors.

There was silence in the Grove for some few minutes,—silence only broken by the twittering of the birds, the shrill screams of the little Italians as they climbed up the hill for the sake of rolling to the bottom, the bell of the Church in the valley, and the swish-swishing of the Aunts' dresses as they sauntered slowly up and down their favourite terrace-walk. The glimmer of their white dresses could be seen from time to time

as they walked nearer to the Grove. Perhaps it was this that made Bors creep closer to Dodo, and speak in a whisper. But he need not have feared, for the trees are quite above telling tales in school or out of school, and the Aunts could not have heard even if they had had the longest ears in the world.

"Dodo," whispered Bors.

"Yes," said Dodo.

"Don't you think we could go to Uncle Jack by ourselves?"

"What,—run away without telling Aunts?" and Dodo gasped.

"No, not *run* away," said Bors indignantly, "but *walk* away. When we get to England we can write and explain. Aunt Fluff and Aunt Hessie will be glad to think that we have got there, and then perhaps they will pack up and start. Don't you think they would, Dodo?"

"It is a *long*, long way to England," said Dodo, slowly and emphatically, "and," very doubtfully, "I am afraid we haven't enough money."

"I don't know how much it will cost," said Bors, "but we have a ten-shilling bit apiece,—have you got yours safe, Dodo?"

"It's wrapped up in paper in the little straw box, made by the prisoners, which Carlina gave me; and it's put away at the back of the drawer where I keep my clothes."

"Mine is wrapped up in *several* pieces of paper," said

Bors, "and tucked into the toe of one of my old boots, —that pair that I *can't* wear again."

"Do you think two ten-shilling bits will be enough to take us to England?" asked Dodo, still doubtfully.

"We can try," said Bors hopefully; "and at any rate it is better than waiting. It seems to me we shall never go if we wait for the Aunts. Each morning when I wake up, I think, 'Perhaps we shall go to-day,' and then such a lot of days go by, and Aunts never say anything about it. Why, Dodo, Aunt Hessie was talking to Aunt Fluff this very afternoon about beginning another drawing of that bit of ruin at the back of the villa. Fancy that, Dodo,—they can't be meaning to go for ever such a long time."

"Suppose the money isn't enough?" said Dodo quakily, "we shall be part of the way there, and shan't be able to get on, or come back."

"We will tell the people that Uncle Jack will pay them," said Bors, calmly, and with the air of Uncle Jack being well known all over the world, "and then they will be sure to take us safely to him."

"Then what about our clothes?" asked Dodo.

"We must leave them behind," said Bors; "they are very old, so it won't much matter. I really don't believe, Dodo, that with all our patching and darning this holland suit will hold together much longer—look!"

The holland suit in question showed signs of much wear and tear. Holland wherewith to mend it was not

so easily get-at-able at Villa Selvóso as in England, and the patches were of every shade from dark brown to white linen, giving Bors much the appearance of a chess board. It was his "scrub" suit, and certainly would not bear more than another wash, even if it survived that, which was doubtful. No wonder Dodo sighed when she obeyed Bors's command and—looked.

"It is very bad," she said, "but if Uncle Jack will give us some new clothes it won't much matter."

"We can't go to-morrow," mused Bors, "because we are going into Florence to spend the day."

"The next day?" suggested Dodo.

"We shall be tired," replied the ruling spirit; "we had better say the day after."

The Aunts walked up and down the terrace never dreaming of the plotting that was going on so close to them. Oddly enough, at that very moment Aunt Hessie was saying to Aunt Fluff something about Jack and his loneliness, and whether they ought not to make up their minds to go back to England, both for his sake and that of the children.

The truth was that the Aunts had got into a groove out of which they found it difficult to break. They had grown accustomed to the life in their quiet little villa in the sunny land of Italy; and the days glided by so smoothly and so rapidly that they almost lost count of time. They were both of them naturally of an indolent disposition, with a great dislike to change of any kind,

and a strong aversion to travelling. They liked to stay in the house all day, reading, working, or painting, taking a long *siesta* in the midst of it, and when the heat of the day was over they could saunter up and down their favourite terrace walk, smelling the sweet scent of the orange flowers which were ranged in pots along it, enjoying the lovely sunsets and the fresh mountain breezes. They were very fond of Bors and Dodo, and kind and caressing in their manner to them. But the brother and sister soon found out after Nanna left, who had been the invalid Aunt's maid, that if they wanted anything done they must do it themselves, or it would not be done at all. It required an effort, but they had both of them a sensitive dread that they were dunces compared with children of their own age who had had regular instruction, and this fear urged them to do their best. Nanna had found time to give them an hour every day; she was a well-educated person, and when she went away they picked themselves up at their lessons just where she had left off with them. Three hours every day they devoted to learning, and Bors was a thorough little martinet, turning a deaf ear to Dodo's oft-repeated murmurs for "just one holiday to-day." Three hours seems a long time when you consider the amount of mending they had upon their hands, but the summer was so long and hot where they were that they often finished their lessons before their second breakfast, which they had with their Aunts at nine o'clock. If

there was anything they stumbled over, after "a good think" about it, they carried their books, or slates, or copybook to Aunt Hessie or Aunt Fluff, and asked them "to please to explain" the difficulty.

There is much talk now-a-days about the bringing-up of children, but this sounds more like tumbling-up anyhow, does it not? It did not do any harm to these children though, for there is an old and very true proverb, "GOD helps those who help themselves." It is great nonsense which some people would make one believe, that they would have done much better if they had been in this or that position. There are always the materials lying close by us to help us to be perfect men and women or children, if only we take them up and work with them. And in this case GOD had made Bors and Dodo more than usually sensible and persevering and helpful in some ways, though in others they were quite as childlike and simple as little children should be. GOD has a *special* love, a *special* care for children, and just at this moment—when Bors and Dodo were getting out of patience and worrying themselves about things they could not help and which it was not in their power to alter or arrange—just then GOD was thinking about them, and if they could only have lifted the curtain a little bit and taken a peep into the future they would have seen——

But you must have the patience Bors and Dodo had not, and wait until the story goes on.

CHAPTER III.

SYDNEY IS INTRODUCED TO THE LADY ROSINA.

"FATHER," said Sydney, "you know those queer little kids I told you about yesterday?"

"Yes?" questioned Mr. Reid, laying down his newspaper.

"I went to see the Aunts this morning."

"It was very early for a visit," said Mr. Reid, laughing. "I wonder what they could have thought of you?"

"Oh, I apologised and put that straight," said Sydney, airily. "You see I must start earlier for the market to-day, for I was dreadfully late yesterday. And the visit had to be paid early or not at all."

"And did you see your little friends?"

"No. They started at six o'clock this morning to spend the day in Florence with some one. But, Father, the Aunts are not a bit what I expected to find them."

"Things and people seldom turn out as we think they will," said Mr. Reid, "but what did you *expect*, Sydney?"

"A couple of old ladies in frilled caps," began Sydney, promptly.

"Oh, Sydney," interrupted his father; "you *know* that old ladies now-a-days never dress in that style. You must have been studying some pictures of 'ages ago.'"

"You did not see the children as I saw them," responded Sydney. "You might have expected *anything* from the sight of those rum little kids. Their holland garments might have been made in the year 1. And they were so patched and darned there wasn't much of the original stuff left. Bors's knees showed quite bare between where his stockings ended and his knickerbockers began. Aunt Hessie and Aunt Fluff I imagined to be a pair of antique old ladies sitting one on each side, in the chimney-corner knitting."

"With the thermometer at 92 that was a sensible thought," said Mr. Reid, drily. "Well, Sydney, I cannot say much for your imagination. Tell me what you really saw."

"Aunt Hessie is fair and Aunt Fluff is dark," explained Sydney. "They are neither of them old, and they are both of them tall and slim. Aunt Fluff was lying upon the sofa reading, and Aunt Hessie was painting. When they moved about they moved very slowly and quietly, and they spoke like this—" and Sydney lowered his voice almost to a whisper.

"I hope you took care to be equally quiet," said Mr. Reid, "or they might not wish to have you for a visitor again."

"*My* voice sounded like a *bassoon*," replied Sydney, "and really once or twice the room was so dusky, and there was such a scent of *pot-pourri* about it, and the Aunts were so quiet and sleepy that I found myself nodding and nearly tumbling off my chair. It wouldn't suit *me* to live with the Aunts. I don't wonder Bors and Dodo frequent their cosy little grove. I like Aunt Hessie the best because she is the widest awake."

"Which one is that?"

"The fair one. She does her hair on the top of her head, so—" and Sydney flourished his hand over the crown of his head; "Aunt Fluff has little curls in front, and not much hair at the back."

"You seem to have taken a great deal of notice of the two ladies," said Mr. Reid, amusedly.

"I was so astonished to find them so different to what I expected," said Sydney, candidly. "And they were dressed just as other ladies dress—all in fashion, I mean. They had no end of tails to their gowns, and it made them appear even taller than they are. When Aunt Hessie came into the room once, and stood by the table, the end of her tail had only just curled round the corner in at the door."

"What did you talk about?" inquired Mr. Reid.

"Oh! about the kids of course," said Sydney. "I

invited them in Bella's name to spend the day with us to-morrow."

"I hope Bella does not mind," said Mr. Reid.

"Bella *mind*," and Sydney's eyes opened wide in surprise at the bare idea. "Why, it's my firm belief that if I brought home half-a-dozen Hottentots and their respective squaws to fill up the sides of the table, Bella wouldn't mind so long as Willie was grinning at her from the bottom. Father, I am sure your head is aching," seeing that Mr. Reid put his hand to his head for a moment.

"It was only a sudden pain and is over now," said Mr. Reid. "It is not going to be one of my bad aches, as you call them. Now don't vex yourself, my dear boy."

But Sydney was at his side in a moment, arranging the cushions of the arm-chair, and passing his hand gently but firmly over his father's temples.

"It's the heat," he said. "Now, Father, I shall stay at home and bathe your forehead with *eau-de-Cologne* and water."

"But it is not aching enough for that," said Mr. Reid. "If I shut my eyes even the little pain that is left will pass away, and I can read my 'Times' until you come home. Now don't be worrying about me while you are out, and think that one of my bad attacks is coming on, for I assure you it is not so."

"You *are* sure?" asked Sydney, anxiously.

"Yes," answered Mr. Reid; "*quite* sure. You know I wouldn't deceive you, Sydney."

"No, Father. But mind you keep quiet until I get back. I shall tell Bella and Willie not to disturb you," and Sydney left the room as quietly as even Aunt Hessie or Aunt Fluff could have moved, first as carefully darkening it by drawing down the sun-blinds.

With a great many people Sydney was not a favourite. They called him conceited, bumptious, opinionated, self-assured, and a variety of other names. Perhaps he was a little of each, but few knew Sydney well enough to realize his wonderful unselfishness, thoughtfulness, and love for "the Governor." Mr. Reid had had a sunstroke some years back, which had left him subject to the most severe headaches. Many a game of rackets, lawn-tennis, and cricket, many a boating excursion, a picnic, and other cherished amusements had Sydney given up without a murmur to sit by his suffering father, and fan him into sleep, or if his head was too bad for that, bathe it incessantly with soft rags, made wet for the purpose by dipping them in *eau-de-Cologne* and water. Sometimes the whole of a beautiful summer's afternoon would pass away while Sydney sat in a cramped position holding "the Governor's" hand in his, and afraid to stir, lest the slightest movement might awake him from the light and restless slumbers into which he had fallen. And Sydney was amply repaid if his father awoke, tired and weak perhaps, but with the dreadful pain quite gone.

No one who saw Sydney in the midst of his companions, the noisiest and fiercest and savagest in that hand-to-hand struggle, most wrongly termed *foot*-ball—no one who saw Sydney then would ever realise that he was the tenderest nurse, gentler, quieter, quicker, and more thoughtful in his father's sick room than any woman could have been.

But his talents did not end here. There may have been truth in people calling him "self-confident and self-assured," for few people managed their houses better than Sydney managed his father's at the age of fourteen. He had taken the burden of the housekeeping upon his young shoulders when not much over eleven. Before he started for his tutor's, he set everything in train for the day, ordered the dinner, and made sure that matters would go on smoothly, without any bother to "the Governor" until he came home. His account books were always correct to a farthing, and I must say that poor Sydney, only he was ashamed to own it, had been nearer to tears over those "horrid books" than over anything that had happened to him in his life before. Great was the temptation to "cook his accounts," to slur them over, to throw them up altogether, but then "they must be kept somehow, and 'the Governor' must not have the bother or worry of them. No doubt they would be easy enough to him, but they might excite his head and bring on one of his bad head-aches." So for the sake of, and for the love he bore to "the Governor," Sydney

put his shoulder to the wheel, and persevered until he could show neat rows of figures perfectly balanced and correct to a fraction. And, as far as lay in his power, the same care was extended to all things that could in any way harass or fret "the Governor." "Not a breath of east wind shall come near him if I can help it," he thought to himself. And he kept his word.

We left him making his way to Bella's morning-room. There, though the day was even yet hot, and promised to be hotter and hotter, he found Bella and Willie as busy as two bees which were now gathering honey from the orange flowers in Bors and Dodo's grove and along the terrace-walk. A big book with blank pages lay open upon the table, paste-pot and scissors by its side, and Willie was pressing, and snipping, and arranging his plants, while Bella, covered up like a piece of furniture in brown-holland, was helping with the pasting, and writing the labels from Willie's dictation.

The husband and wife were absurdly alike. Neither of them handsome, but both of them pleasant and happy-looking. Willie was thin and fair, Bella plump and fair, and Willie wore spectacles, which he constantly pushed over his forehead, forgot they were there, and went hunting for them in every direction.

"Bella," was Sydney's peremptory greeting, "the Governor's head is beginning to ache. *He* says it won't be much, but I am not so sure about that. Now *mind* you don't go into the room to disturb him. He is in

the drawing-room, and I have made it as cool and comfortable for him as I can."

"Very well, dear," said Bella, placidly. "I won't disturb him."

"And if you should be going out, don't on any account slam the door."

"Very well, dear, I'll be careful," said Bella. "But I don't think we shall be going out. We have enough to occupy us at home this morning, haven't we, Willie?"

"Quite enough," answered Willie, cheerfully.

The corners of Sydney's mouth worked themselves down disdainfully as he glanced at the dried plants strewed upon the table.

"I don't envy you," he said. "I would rather be riding into Florence, though the sun is enough to bake you into 'a cake,' than be poking over that miserable stuff. I cannot imagine," and he leaned against the door and looked at Bella thoughtfully and questioningly, "*what* interest you can find in those dried-up things. I can understand people making no end of a fuss over *live* flowers. They are *beautiful*. But when you have taken the greatest pains to squeeze out all life, and colour, and beauty, and leave mere *skeletons*—"

"Ah!" interrupted Bella. "But some of them retain their colour. See," and as she spoke she held towards him a dark blue gentian. But Sydney turned from it in disgust.

"Flabby and lifeless," he said. "It has no beauty for me, thank you, Bella."

Bella was unruffled. She tenderly laid the despised flower in its place, then said,

"Of course, like many other things, it requires that you should be educated up to it. I can quite believe that *you* might not see much beauty in them."

"Nor did you, Mrs. Bella, a year ago," broke in Sydney wickedly.

"We live and learn," murmured Bella, a smile playing hide-and-seek round the corners of her mouth. "But tell me if you asked the children, and if they are coming."

Sydney could not resist telling the whole story over again. Bella grew so interested, that she put down her pen, leaned back in her chair, and listened intently to the end.

"I can't make it out," she said. "From your account they seemed so forlorn and neglected."

"Not forlorn exactly," answered Sydney. "They were jolly enough, but they certainly *looked* neglected. And I thought the Aunts must be something like those old witches in fairy stories. Not that the kids are starved though, for they are as plump as a pair of partridges."

"What do you think about it, Willie?" asked Bella.

"Eh?" answered Willie, looking up for the first time since Sydney entered the room. "This leaf has curled itself round, and I am afraid it will break off. Your

fingers are smaller than mine; come and set it straight, please, Bella."

Which showed that Willie's thoughts had been far away, and he had not heard a word.

Sydney shrugged his shoulders, gave the floor an impatient tap with the toe of his boot, and took himself off. The muleteer did not live far away, but when he got there, the man by spreading out his hands, shaking his head, and a variety of other gestures, made him understand that all the mules had been hired, and there was not one to be had. There was always a difficulty about Sydney and the natives coming to terms, for they could not speak a word of English, and he knew nothing of Italian; nor was he quick to pick it up.

To-day he was particularly disinclined to believe the man. He wanted a mule, and a mule he must have, and it was nonsense to suppose that they were all out already. So in his turn he shook his head fiercely at the man, and they stood for a few seconds shaking their heads at each other. Then the man showing the palms of his hands in mute despair, as one who should say, "I cannot reason with this gentleman: there are no mules to be had, and I can't *make* mules," turned away, and was leaving Sydney to his fate.

"I'll go and see for myself, and if I find you have told me a story"—and Sydney shook his fist threateningly at the retreating back of the muleteer.

But no sooner did the man make out that Sydney's

strides were in the direction of the stables, than he turned and followed him with a tragic expression, and more gestures expressive of despair.

A beautiful soft eye looking out of its corner was the first sight that greeted Sydney as he entered the stable. He stood still in amazement, for, quietly and lazily munching her mid-day repast, there stood the prettiest mule that mortal sight had ever seen.

Her skin was a lovely dark brown shading off evenly into the most delicate tints, and its texture was as soft as a priceless otter-skin. She was beautifully made, and her legs were straight and shapely. Her neck was arched, her head lean and small, and she gave it every now and then a coquettish little toss, as if she wished it to be known that she was aware of her value. And certainly a thoroughbred pony would not have been ashamed to be seen side by side with her. Sydney could not restrain his delight. "You *beauty!*" he cried, stroking her glossy back, then turning upon the man,

"Oh, you wicked old sinner. *What* a story you told. I'm ashamed of you!"

Of course the man did not understand the sense of the words, but he took in their meaning; for he made humble deprecating gestures, evidently begging Sydney's pardon for deceiving him. Though when Sydney pointed to the saddle which hung near, he shook his head as obstinately as ever, and as if to show that he really *meant* to be firm, he planted both his hands in the pockets of

the loose coloured linen jacket which he had thrown over him when Sydney came in sight.

"He's stupid as well as wicked," murmured Sydney. "Here, you phrase-book, let us see if we can make him understand his own language."

This phrase-book was a joke against Sydney. He walked about with it always tucked under his arm, and though he never could find what he wanted in it, still he went back to it with renewed faith. Many had been the disappointments it had given him, but he clung to his phrase-book in spite of everybody, still hoping against hope that it might be useful to him some time.

He opened it haphazard. "'She has got a cold.' 'It is time to go home to dinner.' 'She is seventy years old.' 'It is foggy weather,'—as if it ever *was* foggy in Italy; but the muleteer's brain is foggy enough, and I want to clear it. Bother the book; there's never anything in it. Well, if the old fellow *won't* understand, I'll saddle the beauty myself, and walk her off from under her master's very nose without saying 'with your leave,' or 'by your leave,'" and Sydney stretched out his hand to reach the saddle.

Again the man interposed, talked rapidly, and gesticulating as if his life depended upon getting Sydney away from that mule and the saddle. And of all that he said Sydney understood but three words—"La dama Rosina." He referred again to his phrase-book. "La dama," he hunted through various pages, and at last alighted upon

it—"'The lady.' Oh, well, I suppose that's the name of the mule, and a very pretty name it is too—The Lady Rosina. What the name has to do with my not riding her I can't conceive. The old chap has gone off his head, had too much to take last night, and hasn't waked up quite himself this morning."

The muleteer saw that Sydney was determined to ride the Lady Rosina, and whatever were his objections to the contrary, he set them aside, contenting himself with a muttered ejaculation, which might mean a good deal, or nothing at all. The Lady Rosina did not relish being disturbed. She kicked viciously several times, much to Sydney's satisfaction.

"She seems to have some *spirit*," he remarked. "Now the worst of mules is, that they are so unlike other animals, horses and dogs. They have no separate character. They are like a dinner service—all of one set, and all the same pattern. I believe *that*, and not their obstinacy lies at the bottom of their being so much abused. Now, my Lady Rosina, put your best leg foremost. Good day, old chap, I hope you'll have found your senses by the time we meet again. Gee up, my fair lady. It must be slow and steady down the hill, but when we are in the valley then you shall work off some of your superfluous spirits in a brisk gallop."

The road to Florence lay for some distance through the pretty winding valley; past the rich yellow corn, still and upright, with no air to sway it to and fro,—it was

from this corn that the people got their straw for plaiting—past vineyards where the grapes were darkening for the vintage; past cottages, where the doors stood open, and the olive-skinned children could be seen lying asleep upon the floor; past silent villas standing white and cool upon the brow of the hills, sheltered by thick trees from the glare and heat of the sun; past the grove where Bors and Dodo loved to sit; and past the terrace-walk up and down which the Aunts glided when the air grew cool and the sun nearer to the mountains. But the grove was as deserted as the terrace to-day, and Sydney lifting himself in his saddle, craned his neck to peer up at it, then remembered that "the kids" were in Florence, whither he was wending his way, and wondered if he should come across them.

For the second time this morning Sydney found his expectations not realized. That kicking out in the stable was the only sign of any spirit in her that the Lady Rosina deigned to show. "The Governor is always right," thought Sydney; "he said people and things generally turn out quite different to what you expect, and I am sure that the Lady Rosina is as great an example of this as the Aunts were. Who would have dreamt when she looked such a beauty and kicked so delightfully that she would turn out such a dolt of an ass."

Sydney renewed his efforts. At this pace when would he get his business done and be home again with "the Governor?" about the state of whose head he was not

altogether easy. Those bad attacks were very weakening, and he was anxious to stave them off whenever he could. And he had no faith in Bella now she had Willie to engross her. But he did Bella an injustice, for she was too kind-hearted not to remember Mr. Reid, even if twenty Willies were in the way.

So Sydney coaxed the Lady Rosina, threatened her, whipped her; spoke kindly, slowly, softly, loudly, but to no purpose. If he had been a dummy perched upon her glossy back, instead of a human being, the Lady Rosina could not have behaved with more calm indifference. His whip did not appear to sting her in the very least; his coaxing and threatening words fell, as it seemed, upon ears as deaf as a post. Solemnly, gravely, lazily, the Lady Rosina pranced along, scarcely taking the trouble to lift her feet from the ground, and moving so slowly that the bells round her neck were almost noiseless, except when, once and again, she would toss her pretty head disdainfully, as if in impatience at the load she was forced to carry.

It was very provoking. Sydney remembered a story he had once read where some people living in the country were going to a ball, and not wishing to have their own horses out so late, hired a pair from the town close by. They started late, the ball was miles away, and the coachman could not get the horses to stir beyond a foot's pace. The drive was a very wearying one, and the poor tired-out folk arrived when more than half the fun was

over. They dreaded the return home, but to their utter astonishment the horses cantered back at a brisk pace, which carried them over the ground in a very short time. The mystery was solved the next day, for, upon making inquiry, it was found that the other horses had all been engaged, and not liking to lose the custom of the family, the master of the inn had ordered that the pair of horses should be sent which were always kept for *funerals*. This was the reason of the solemn foot's pace there, and the brisk canter home. Sydney pondered this story, and tried to remember what he had heard of funerals in Italy, and whether it was possible that the Lady Rosina might be employed in attending only upon funerals. There was some consolation in the thought, for, at any rate, he would get back again fast enough.

CHAPTER IV.

"WHERE THERE'S A WILL, THERE'S A WAY."

UP a steep hill, then a turn to the right, on level ground for a quarter of a mile, then through another valley with larger Villas, and here and there a palace just showing over the brow of the hill, then again to ascend, and when next they reached level ground the walls and towers of Florence came in sight.

Like a horse when he hears the battle cry, the Lady Rosina no sooner caught sight of the walls of Florence than "a change came o'er the spirit of her dream." She stopped, pricked back her ears, opened her mouth, sniffed in the air, tossed her head, and without any warning started away in a wild, mad, tearing gallop.

The change was such a sudden one that Sydney nearly came a "nasty cropper," but when he recovered his balance the motion was so delightful after the tantalising snail's pace that he did not attempt to check her, not

until the gates of Florence were entered, and the Lady Rosina shot off in exactly the opposite direction to the one in which he wanted to go.

He tried to pull her up, but on she went, gallop, gallop, gallop. The passers-by stopped to look admiringly after her,—such a handsome mule and such a fine pace.

"Woa, woa, woa," sang out Sydney, and sang out in vain. Further and further away the Lady Rosina was taking him. If he pulled the reins she stopped for a second, but only to kick out with her hind legs and then—gallop, gallop, gallop, as fast as she could tear.

"Woa—wo—wo—o—" cried Sydney soothingly. "Hullo, perhaps the little beast doesn't understand English. I wonder what is the Italian for stop!" And, under difficulties, Sydney grappled with his phrase-book, opening it at, "How do you do, sir?" "I am very well, sir, and you, sir, how do you do?"

"Utter trash," growled Sydney, much inclined to fling the book at the fair head of the Lady Rosina. "As if a fellow wanted to ask a galloping brute of a mule, 'How do you do, sir?' There is never anything in these beastly books except the wrong things," and he shut it up in great disgust.

As the Lady Rosina had taken her own solemn pace at first starting, so now she made up her mind to pursue this reckless gallop, which was to end—only she herself knew where. Sydney's choice lay between two evils—

he must go where she was taking him, or allow himself to be kicked off—when he would be his own master again. He considered for a moment, and did not care for the appearance of the road; if he fell upon the back of his head it would be "a nasty cropper" indeed, and it *might* end in "the Governor" having no one to look after him in his old age. No, it wouldn't do to risk the coming off, he must again yield—to fate and the Lady Rosina.

"I feel like Johnny Gilpin," he thought, "and it's lucky my hair sticks on to my head 'of its own accord,' as the kids say. I hope the Governor isn't ill, for if this horrid brute doesn't pull up soon I shan't be home before night, and the Governor will be half out of his mind, thinking I am smashed in a street row. Well, I was right when I said the beastie had go in her. She is going it to some purpose, and no mistake."

She was. Past the beautiful Church of San Giovanni, past squares with fountains playing in the midst of them, past the house where Dante lived and dreamed his dreams of "Beatrice," down quiet streets and noisy streets, and, though of course Sydney did not know it, past the house where Bors and Dodo were spending the day. Then past the gardens called the Boboli, where the band was silent and the usually gay scene was hushed and still, for every one in Florence was sleeping their noonday nap. Down more streets, further from the heart of the city, near upon the outskirts of it, and

then the Lady Rosina stopped of her own sweet will in front of a small house, detached from others and surrounded by a stone wall.

The entrance was by an iron gate which was ajar, and without ceremony or delay the Lady Rosina instantly pushed through. They were in a square courtyard—a tiny fountain played in its midst, and flowers in pots were stiffly ranged against the wall. A large window, evidently quite newly put in, opened down to the ground.

In front of this the Lady Rosina stopped suddenly still. She thought it the time and place in which to rid herself of the burden she had carried so unwillingly. Without giving him an instant in which to alight she ducked her head between her front legs, and with a couple of vigorous and well directed kicks she sent him spinning through the window.

He came down upon his hands and knees in the middle of the room, his basket flying into one corner, his helmet into another, and his phrase-book alighting, as neatly as though it had been aimed, upon the nose of a gentleman lying asleep upon the sofa.

Before going to sleep the gentleman had carefully covered himself with a large silk pocket-handkerchief, to protect his face and more especially his nose from the attacks of the flies which swarmed in the room. On his journey back from dreamland he thought that all the flies in the world had strung themselves together into

one huge ball, and whirled down plump upon his poor nose. Still half asleep he lifted up one hand to rub his injured member, and instead of his nose his hand caught hold of—a book.

He uncovered his face, yawned, opened his eyes, and stroked the outside of the book. Then he carefully adjusted a double gold eyeglass to his eyes, opened the book, and read aloud—

"Did you sleep well last night?" "I did not sleep a wink last night." "I hope your brother is well, sir?" Then he shut it up and stared thoughtfully at the ceiling, as if he wondered how it happened to rain down books from there. He was evidently a gentleman who came to conclusions by very slow degrees.

"Books are not thrown without hands," he said at last, speaking his thoughts aloud. Then he slowly lifted feet and legs from the sofa and sat upright.

He was a middle-aged gentleman, clothed in a dressing-gown the like of which had surely never been seen before, and never will be again, unless it is made to order. The groundwork was a deep crimson, the pattern —a town in China. There were streets filled with houses and people; here and there a Chinese lady and gentleman carrying on a flirtation under the cover of two large fans; here were people buying, others selling, some driving, some walking. Here was an ornamental garden with stiff looking flowers and shrubs, gay plumed birds playing hide-and-seek among the branches. Then there

were pagodas with people of all ages running at the doors, and quaint little children gambolling about. Here was a faded blue lake with a boat upon it, and here was an afternoon tea-party, the guests drinking their tea from delicate handleless teacups. Not two inches of the dressing-gown were alike, every scrap of it was different.

Sydney's first hope had been to escape unseen. But in one corner lay his helmet, too expensive and needful a luxury to be wilfully thrown away, and upon the nose of the gentleman was his unlucky phrase-book with his name and address in full. There was nothing for it but to stay and brave it out. When the gentleman sat up he opened his mouth to stammer some confused words of apology, but the wonderful dressing-gown so completely attracted his attention and entangled his thoughts that he forgot his apology and stood speechless.

"It is scarcely a courteous proceeding," said the gentleman very slowly, very precisely, speaking every syllable, and not directly addressing Sydney, but looking as if he might mean the tables or chairs, "to enter a private house by the window; and it is not a very polite way of awakening the master of the house from his noon-day sleep by throwing a book at his head."

Sydney was covered with confusion and angry with himself for being at a loss. "I feel I might be a lobster, a poppy, a peony, a young lady in her teens," he thought. "I'm getting redder and redder. Oh, Sydney Reid,

when *have* you disgraced yourself like this?—and *blushing* too. It's dreadful. And I can't explain it. He'll never believe me. He'll be sure to think I'm stuffing him."

"*Did* any one speak?" asked the gentleman politely.

"No, thank you," blurted Sydney. "I am very sorry. I beg your pardon for—coming—in—like—this."

"Don't mention it," said the gentleman, with *extra* politeness. "The habits of young gentlemen now-a-days are, I am told, apt to be eccentric. Do my eyes deceive me, or do I see something—white—in the corner of the room?" and he was getting up leisurely to examine for himself, when Sydney sprang forward.

"It is my helmet, sir," he said, picked it up, and twirled it impatiently in his hand, while, growing hotter and hotter, he spoke rapidly. "It does seem very rude, but I really couldn't help it. She *threw* me in—chucked me over her head as neatly as if I had been a bundle of hay or a load of sticks," and Sydney writhed under the calm way in which the gentleman through his eye-glass was examining the helmet, as if wondering of what use such a queer-shaped article could be.

"*She* threw you in? Do you mean," and he turned his eye-glass sternly upon Sydney's scarlet face, "to tell *me*—a man old enough to be your father—such an extraordinary story as this—that a woman threw *you* against your will into this room? Young gentleman—"

"No, I don't, sir," interrupted Sydney. "I never

said anything about a woman. It was the obstinatest, wilfulest, pigheadedest brute of—"

"Such names are most unseemly," said the gentleman calmly. "If I mistook what you said, you yourself are to blame. You said 'she,'—I am sure you said 'she.'"

"I ought to have explained better," said Sydney, ashamedly. "When I said '*she*' I meant a *mule*, and of all the brutes I ever came across—"

"If you had studied natural history in ever so slight a degree," said the gentleman, leaning back and speaking with provoking coolness, "you would not have been surprised at the conduct of your mule. The obstinacy of mules is so noted that it is a proverb in every nation."

At this moment the door opened. Another gentleman entered the room, the counterpart of the first—alike in height, alike in face, alike in double eye-glass, and alike in gorgeous dressing-gown!

"Brother," said the gentleman upon the sofa, whom we must call No. 1, for Sydney never found out their names, and the other No. 2, "this young gentleman has done us the honour of paying us a morning call. I would introduce him to you more formally, but I have not myself the pleasure of knowing his name."

"Two rum old chaps," was Sydney's comment; "as like one another as a couple of peas." Then aloud, he said quietly, for he was recovering his self-possession, "My name is Sydney Reid. The Gov—I mean my father—and I are on a visit to some friends who are

staying at the Villa Fornerari on the hills, about six miles from Florence. We are on our way from New York to England."

"Beautiful country England," said the second gentleman, speaking as slowly and measuredly as his brother; "it is our native land. My brother's health requires that we should reside away from it for the present; but some day before very long we hope to return thither. Do we not, brother?"

"It is the greatest wish of our lives, brother," said the gentleman upon the sofa.

A pause. Sydney felt he was expected to say something, and not in the least knowing *what*, but thinking he was making an utter idiot of himself, he said desperately,

"I hope you will soon have your wish gratified," and was astonished to find from the pleased faces of the two brothers that it was exactly the right thing. They both bowed their heads politely, and said,

"Thank you!"

In his after life this day stood out most prominently in Sydney's memory. Often, when it had become a thing long past, a peculiar scent, a chance word, a note of music would bring the scene as vividly as if it were real before his memory. And he never thought of the brothers without the vision of a *minuet* rising before him. It seemed the most natural thing to associate with them. If they had gone through life dancing a minuet it would

not have caused Sydney any surprise, it was just what they were most fitted for. Every movement, word, look, gesture, was so precise, so slow, so dignified, so grand. It was impossible to imagine them in a hurry. Should the house catch on fire, Sydney was sure the greatest danger would not make them hasten in the least. Slowly they would get up, slowly dress themselves, slowly put on their gorgeous dressing-gowns, slowly place their skull caps upon their grey heads, most likely adjusting them before the looking-glass, slowly slip on their double eye-glasses, perhaps peering out of them to see what progress the flames were making, then slowly and with dignified tread, step down stairs, firmly and composedly cross the threshold of their home, and with heads erect and feet well-planted on the ground, watch from a safe distance the blazing ruins. When all was over, slowly shut up their eye-glasses and say composedly,

"And now, brother, we had better go to an hotel and get a bed and some breakfast."

"That would be much the best plan, brother."

And thinking these thoughts, Sydney found his mind wandering still farther away, his eyes and attention distracted, lost in wonder among the bewildering scenes of the marvellous dressing-gowns.

"Ahem," coughed the two brothers almost at the same time.

"I beg your pardon," said Sydney, starting for the second time that morning from a most unusual reverie.

"It's the dressing-gowns," he was nearly saying aloud, but luckily checked himself just in time. "I must go and look after that brute of a mule. I had forgotten all about her, and she may be miles away by this time. *If* I find her she must take me back quite differently to the style in which she brought me here." And Sydney stopped with a puzzled expression, for he had not the least idea how or where to look for that erratic lady, the Lady Rosina.

The gentleman upon the sofa explained the matter to his brother, but the words, terms, and language were as different as possible from those used by Sydney when he gave *his* explanation.

"As this occurred upon our premises, we shall feel it our duty, as well as our pleasure, to help you in your search for the missing animal," said the second gentleman, who had listened with grave attention, "shall we not, brother?"

"Certainly we shall, brother," said the gentleman upon the sofa, gathering himself together and rising by degrees. Just as the first gentleman had peered at Sydney's helmet, so now the second gentleman after eyeing for a minute through his glasses a distant corner, said,

"That basket does not belong to us, does it, brother?"

"Oh, it is mine. I had forgotten. Thank you," and Sydney picked it up and slung it upon his arm.

"I think," said the first gentleman, who now stood

upright, "that this is your property also," and with a polite bow he handed to Sydney that unfortunate phrase-book.

Blushing redder than the "red, red rose," as he thought *where* that book had alighted, feeling at the same time strongly inclined to laugh, and wishing he could look as if he and the book had no connection with each other, Sydney took it reluctantly from the fingers of the gentleman—slender fingers with almond-shaped nails, and white and delicate as a fine lady's.

With slow, stately steps the two brothers marched to the door, held it open for Sydney to pass through, bowing one from either side of it, when he tried to wait until the last. The same with the front door, and then they were in the paved courtyard where the Lady Rosina had entered without ceremony. The three stood silent for a moment while Sydney glanced around.

Opposite to the gate through which he had entered was another gate which stood nearly wide open. The brothers noticed Sydney's eyes wander to this, and the second gentleman spoke in answer,

"That gate leads into another courtyard, into which the kitchen and offices open; there is a back entrance to it, so that if your mule pushed her way into it, most likely the servants noticed her and let her out."

"Then bye-bye to my ever seeing her again," said Sydney dolefully, "if that is the case."

"We had better examine the place, brother," said

gentleman No. 1. "The animal may have been tired, and contented herself with resting there."

Again they stood aside for Sydney to pass, and as he preceded them he felt that he must have gone back a couple of centuries, and would awake presently to find he had dreamt this scene, and was lying upon a sofa in the Villa Fornerari. The second courtyard was larger than the first, and not ornamented by flowers or fountain, though it was clean, and well kept. In a corner of it was a shed, perhaps a wood shed, which had been turned into a rough sort of stable. In this temporary stable flickered a short silky brown tail, and out of it looked forth a beautiful but malicious eye. The Lady Rosina stood at her ease, and quite as much at home as if she had been in her own stall in her own mountain home.

Sydney's exclamation was lost in the surprise of both the gentlemen.

"It is the Lady Rosina, brother!"

"Brother, it is the Lady Rosina," they said, as if with one voice.

Then with measured stately tread they both walked up to her and patted her sleek sides. She knew them well, rubbed her forehead against each coat-sleeve in turn, and seemed much excited. When Sydney came up she turned upon him the wickedest look out of the corners of her dove-like eyes. Triumph and saucy daring were mingled together; it really was as though she were laughing at him.

"Such a *beautiful* coat, brother, is it not?" said gentleman No. 2.

"Brother, you may well call it beautiful. It is as smooth and soft as a piece of velvet."

"And such a finely shaped head, brother."

"Yes, brother, is it not? And such expressive eyes."

"This *is* pleasant," thought Sydney indignantly, "to go petting and praising a brute that behaves like—like—well, like nothing less than a *fiend*. And she looks it out of the corner of her 'expressive eyes,' she does. Bother the brute!" And Sydney waxed more and more indignant, for he was conscious of feeling most unpleasantly *skinned* about the regions of elbows and knees, and if any one deserved petting and coaxing, surely it ought to have been the poor victim, and not the Lady Rosina; beautiful indeed, but wilful, and obstinate as she had proved herself to be.

"I think, brother," said gentleman No. 1, "that the Lady Rosina is expecting us to give her something to eat. Dear little Violet always petted her so much. I will fetch her something."

"No, brother," said gentleman No. 2. "I shall not allow you to exert yourself." ("As if either of them *could* exert himself," thought Sydney, who was growing quite fierce.) "I will fetch the Lady Rosina all she requires. Do you stay here and pat her."

And as, with head erect, he slowly paced away, the

other brother turned to Sydney, and explained the mystery connecting the Lady Rosina with them.

A short time back a little niece from England had been spending some months with them, accompanied by her mother. She was very fond of riding, and the Lady Rosina had been bought for her use while she was there. The Lady Rosina was quite young, this was the first home she had ever had, and her name was given to her by the little niece who had been her first mistress. The little Violet's favourite ride had been to the hill just outside the gates of the city, and it was at this spot that the Lady Rosina had remembered the way to her old home, and had made for it as fast as her four brown legs would carry her. A few weeks ago Violet went back to England, and, having no further use for the Lady Rosina, they sold her to the muleteer, pressing him to treat her very kindly, as she had been so spoilt while with them. That was the last they had seen of her until her appearance there to-day. The second brother now came back laden with fresh white roll, sugar, and chocolate bonbons, of all of which the Lady Rosina partook freely.

"Well, if she's wicked, she at least knows which side her bread is buttered," thought Sydney, as he watched the dainties disappear. "An easy life with petting and caressing, white rolls and chocolate on one side, and on the other very little petting, no sugar, rolls, or chocolate, and plenty of hard work. Yes, I should call her a sensible brute, but a *wicked* one."

There may have been real love, mixed with the cupboard-love, in the Lady Rosina's heart, for she evidently wanted *something* besides the chocolate and white roll. Her eyes—a gentle light had come into them now—wandered restlessly from side to side, and her ears pricked back at each footfall that passed along the road.

"She is watching and listening for Violet, brother," said gentleman No. 1, sadly.

"And she will watch and listen in vain, brother," said the other, equally sadly.

They both of them stroked her after this, and there was a sad silence. Little Violet's pattering feet were dear to them, and the Lady Rosina received an extra share of patting because she too missed the absent darling.

Sydney was obliged to leave the Lady Rosina in the home in which she preferred to stay. Coaxing, threatening, scolding were used to no purpose, she refused to stir a step, and the brothers would not allow the whip to come near her glossy shoulders. She must stay there, at all events for the night, they said.

Sydney had to walk home; he did not mind this, but he minded very much the superior smile of the muleteer, and the humiliating fact that he had been conquered by the Lady Rosina.

He need not have fretted himself over that, for he was not the only one she conquered. She was fetched

from the brothers' house, but the muleteer could never train her to be worth anything. She refused to stir beyond a snail's pace, and would, at any moment that the fancy seized her, stop suddenly short, and kick her rider over her head. Having done it with such success in one case, she thought perhaps it ought to succeed in all. Obstinate as is the race of mules, she beat all that had ever been known. And in that mountain country which was her home, if the people want to point a moral very strongly, the Lady Rosina is introduced,—

"You are as obstinate as a mule,—oh, you are *more* obstinate,—you are as obstinate as the Lady Rosina herself!"

The mountain country which *was* her home,—it is not so now. The poor muleteer melted into tears when he said she was worse than no mule at all, for she ate her head off, and did not earn what her keep cost him. He told his story to the brothers, and, touched by what they were pleased to term her constancy, they bought her back from him, took her with them to England, and made a present of her to their much beloved Violet. Upon the fresh sweet grass of a pleasant park in a southern county of England, beneath the shade of grand wide-spreading trees, trots the Lady Rosina, carrying upon her glossy, satiny back her never-forgotten mistress, for whose voice she always listens, the touch of whose hand upon her bridle-rein she knows among a hundred. And there are those who say that in the

whole of England there is not a handsomer mule than the Lady Rosina.

"I am so much obliged to my Uncles for giving me the Lady Rosina for my very own, Mother," says little Violet. "She canters faster than Cousin Darry's pony, and she is so gentle and nice. I like her better than *any* pony."

Sydney would rather remember the dressing-gowns than the Lady Rosina. *They* took his fancy hugely, and he said he "should not be satisfied until he had found 'the Governor' one *just the same.*"

"They are so interesting, that they are as good as a story-book," he explained. "And you know, Father, that when you are ill and wear a dressing-gown, you want something to amuse you. I shall look out for one in Paris,—you can get everything there, so the folks say."

CHAPTER V.

DULCIE'S SECRET.

A COUPLE of respectable, well-conducted animals appeared before the gates of the Villa Selvóso to take Bors and Dodo into Florence; not nearly so handsome as the Lady Rosina, not so choice in either form or colouring, but a pair of mules that trotted gaily along to the sweet music of their silver bells, and would have thought it much beneath their dignity to indulge in any of those mad antics which gave the Lady Rosina such delight. A boy on another mule went with the children,—they all spent the day in Florence, and came home in the cool of the evening.

It was yet early when they reached the city, but the world was astir, and had been for some time, and the business of the day had long since begun. Bors and Dodo walked their mules, and looked around with wide-open eyes, and with a great interest for everything that

went on around them. It was all so different from their retired little villa upon the brow of the hill, that they tried to make the most of it,—gazed yearningly at the children playing round the softly splashing fountains; scented the flowers as people passed them from the market laden with big bunches rich in colour, sweet in smell from the burning heat of the bright Italian sun; drew up their mules in front of the churches, and watched until the doors were opened and they caught a glimpse of the great, cool, dark space inside; listened and looked at a man selling cakes,—looked again, this time more wistfully,—remembered they were hungry, and turned their mules into a quiet street where noises and cries reached them mellowed by distance,—then stopped in front of a house about half-way down, and Carlo helped them to alight.

Before they had time to knock, the door was opened as if they were watched and waited for. The man who welcomed them was tall and broad, and big altogether; his hair was brown, tumbling in thick heavy locks over his high forehead; the brown was broken here and there by patches of silver, which showed that trouble, and not age, had sent the snow which silvered it. His eyes were brown, kind, honest, true eyes with a sad, patient look in them. The same look was repeated upon the mouth. A brown waving beard and thick moustache hid the shape of his face.

Bors's heart twinged with a sorrowful pang as he re-

turned the kindly greeting. In planning their departure to England, he had forgotten Ben, his great friend and adviser. They could not take Ben and Dulcie with them, that was certain, and never to look upon that sad kind face again—the thought was intolerable. Bors set it aside and would not think it. His firmness of purpose wavered. He stole a glance at Dodo to see if the same idea was troubling *her*, but Dodo's square sensible face was placid and unmoved.

"Where is Dulcie?" she was asking.

"I expect her every moment," said Ben. "Are you not later than usual this morning, or am I more fidgety? I have been to the door several times to watch for you. Perhaps you did not start so early?"

"Oh, yes," said Bors, "but we came slowly through the streets, and stopped a lot of times."

"Ah, that was it then," said Ben. "Breakfast is quite ready, and I am sure you must be ready for *it*. By the time you have taken off your hats Dulcie will be home. Oh, here she is."

A merry laugh, a dancing of little feet along the passage,—Dulcie never walked,—the door slowly opened to admit, first a shoulder, then a foot, then the back part of a head, then the door was quickly shut, the feet danced back, the merry laugh broke out, bubbling over, irresistible and catching,—for Bors, Dodo, and Ben joined heartily in it, not in the least knowing what they were laughing at,—nor did Dulcie for the matter of that.

Softly and on tip-toe danced those fairy feet; Ben, who was used to her ways, hid behind the door, and opened it just as a little hand noiselessly grasped the handle. With one bound Dulcie was in his strong arms, hugging him round the neck, smothering him with kisses, and pealing forth peal upon peal of bewitching laughter.

She was midway between five and six, tall for her age, thin and slender, with a face like a little white flower, and the fairest, softest, fluffiest of hair. Hair, in colour of the delicatest, palest golden, and so fluffy that when she shook her head,—and she had a trick of shaking her head,—each hair seemed to stand out distinct from the others. Her eyes were not very large, but most wonderfully bright, catching the light and flashing it back again like nothing but a pair of diamonds; it was hard to tell their colour, for they never looked the same two minutes together. No name could have been found more fitting than Dulcie. Fair as a lily she was, and her merry laugh was sweeter than the music of tiny silver bells. She did not remember her mother, but "Father Ben," as she always called him, was father, mother, sister, brother, play-mate all in one. "Father Ben" was her own fancy, no one knew why she had taken to it, but the name had come so coaxingly from the rosy baby lips that they never checked it. It had grown with her growth, she could not have left it off now, and her father had become so accustomed to it that it did not sound strange to him. Even when Bors and Dodo

fell into the habit, and caught their words back, he only laughed and said they might call him what they liked. So, when by themselves, they often spoke of him as "Dulcie's Father Ben," sometimes as Father Ben.

"Keep some kisses for your visitors," said her father, and Dulcie dropped lightly down upon the floor, and welcomed Bors and Dodo with glee.

Then Ben reminded them that "breakfast was getting cold," and Dulcie carried them off at once to her room.

Dodo's face was unusually grave, and she heaved a piteous sigh as she dabbled her hands in the cool water. Bors and Dodo had both of them firm, small, well-shaped hands, but they were burnt a deep brown, and each forefinger torn and rough with their constant work. Then, with all their care of broad-brimmed hats and sheltering trees, their faces, by the side of Dulcie's delicate fairness, were the shade of a couple of light-coloured coffee-berries. Dodo's eyes sought her dress, —they had put on their best suits, but even these had been washed countless times, and mended in several places—while there stood Dulcie in her soft, white, clinging dress, fresh as a field daisy. Poor Dodo, she could not bear the comparison. She turned away her head, and a tear,—made up partly of envy, partly of sadness,—gathered in each eye, trembled upon the lashes for a moment, then fell into the basin.

If these tears had been the forerunners of others, it would have been a bad beginning of a very happy day,

but just then Bors came up and plunged his hands into the water. The sight of the four brown paws swimming about looked so comical that Bors and Dodo burst out laughing both at the same instant. Of course Dulcie's head pushed between them to see the fun, and her silvery peals of laughter soon joined in with theirs.

"Nothing makes *me* brown," she said regretfully, caressing one soft white hand with the other.

"Why you don't *want* to be brown, *do* you?" said Dodo amazedly; while Bors, with his ruling spirit, thought the affair settled when he said decidedly,

"It is much better to be *white*, Dulcie,—you keep white."

"No it isn't," said Dulcie rather indignantly. Then pensively, "Father Ben is brown, you know; I'd like to be *everything* that Father Ben is."

Their coffee was poured out and cooling when they went down stairs. The room in which they had breakfast was long, and low in the ceiling, and divided halfway by three steps which led up to a raised platform or daïs. The walls and floor were of stained wood, and the breakfast-table was placed upon the raised portion, in front of an open window, looking out into a garden.

It was small but lovely, a mass of blooming flowers and creepers; in the midst splashed a fountain, at the end of it was a summer-house, and flying about in every direction, now balancing upon the flowers and shrubs,

now bathing and dressing themselves in the fountain, were birds as many and as bright in colour as the flowers themselves. They could not fly away, for a trellis work suspended upon tall poles, and fastened down at every side, prevented them. This was Dulcie's garden, and these were Dulcie's pets.

She was a dreadful chatterbox her father told her, as at breakfast her tongue ran on. She had killed her doll, she told Dodo, to find out what she was made of, but she did not mind, for she liked something that could *love* her, and Dolly always *looked* the same, never laughed when she praised her, never cried or was sorrowful when she scolded her. And the day after Dolly died something came in her place, something that could——, but here Dulcie covered up her face and cried out,

"Father Ben, say something else, say something else! There is my secret coming out! Stop it, Father Ben. Say something else, or I shall tell them my secret. Quick, quick."

"Shall I say that we are going to the gardens after tea to hear the band play?" asked Ben.

Dulcie uncovered her face.

"You can tell them *that*," she said, and when Bors and Dodo were clapping their hands delightedly, she explained—

"Father Ben has been getting on with his work that he may have time to take us. We are to have tea *very* early, and start *directly* after. And we may ——. Father

Ben, oh, there's my secret coming out again—what *shall* I do to keep it in?"

"Don't talk so much," said Ben, giving her another slice of bread and butter, and cracking the top of her egg.

She shook her head at him, until her hair was like a clematis bush.

"I haven't seen them for such a long time, and I have got such a lot to tell them."

"And I dare say they have as much to tell *you*, if you give them the chance!" said her father. "You have done more than your share of talking, and not enough of eating."

"Where did you go this morning?" asked Bors. "For a walk?"

"Just round the corner into the church," said Dulcie. "I always go into the church every morning."

"For five minutes, not more," said Ben, smiling at her.

"I get tired if I stay longer," she answered. "I only go to talk a little bit to GOD, you know. I tell Him all I have to tell Him, and then I come away. It doesn't take me long. I have to ask Him to take *great* care of Father Ben all day. And to-day I had to ask Him twice, because I told Him Father Ben was busy and could not come to ask for himself. And just as I was——. Oh, say *something*, please, Father Ben. There's my secret again. I *wish* breakfast was over. My secret *will* come out, and I shall *not* be able to stop it!"

"I can't think what your secret has to do with church," said Ben. "You must have made a mistake, Dulcie."

"No," she said saucily, shaking her head at him. "That is two secrets, one for you and another for Bors and Dodo."

"Then we had better all of us talk so fast that you shall not be able to get in a word," said her father, "for if my lady finds it so difficult to keep *one* secret, what will it be with two?" Then he turned to Bors and Dodo, and asked them question after question, which they were ready enough to answer.

"My lady" was a pet name Ben sometimes called his little daughter.

So the chatterbox ate her breakfast, managing however to put in her tiny oar now and again, though she steered clear of "the secret." You might as well try to tame a butterfly as to keep Dulcie quiet in her excitable moods. And she was so very excitable that Father Ben sighed often as he noticed her excessive purity of colouring. It always seemed as if Dulcie was like one of those delicate church spires the clouds were fond of forming, and that a rougher breath of air might shiver her into atoms.

And if thoughts such as these pushed themselves in and disturbed the peaceful happiness of Father Ben's life, he was doubly careful that no shadow of them should fall upon Dulcie. Not even a passing trouble

had vexed for a moment that fair little head, but if trouble came I think Dulcie would bear it as the flowers do. Have you never noticed when heavy footsteps pass across a field, and the gentle daisies are crushed to the earth, and you perhaps sorrowfully say they will never rise again? But it is not the case, for after a while those same daisies that were crushed and bruised right themselves upon their slender stalks, and smile up lovingly into the sky. So with Dulcie. Her flower-head might be bowed for a time, but it would hold itself up firm and erect as ever. It is the best way to take troubles, and worries, and vexations. Bend your head until they have swept over it, and then right yourself again—be brave, be cheerful.

There was much to be done after breakfast,—the birds to be fed, Dulcie's treasures to be shown, and Bors and Dodo had to tell her of the great event in their lives since last they had met—the appearance of Sydney Reid upon the scene. Dulcie took a great interest in their account of him, called him "the big boy," and tried to make them promise to bring him when next they came to Florence. The table had been cleared away from the daïs, and here, sitting like three little tailors upon the bare floor, the children settled themselves for the remainder of the morning. Dulcie's hoardings were on every side of them—Chinese tops and puzzles, Japanese fans and boxes, a carved cart and horse from Switzerland, tin soldiers, bricks, a cup and

ball from Germany, battledore and shuttlecock, a doll's house, and a number of pretty little knick-knacks from Paris—all of them picked up by Father Ben in his travels, and a perfect mine of wealth to Bors and Dodo, whose only treasures were—a battered old paint-box with not more than half-a-dozen paints in it belonging to Bors, and a doll with one eye, half a nose, and a scanty allowance of clothes, belonging to Dodo. Both these were relics of the Aunts' young days, and had descended in this condition to their nephew and niece. Neither Bors nor Dodo had ever hinted to Dulcie the state of affairs at home; if they had, the generous little soul would have heaped every toy she possessed into a box, and have sent it off post haste to the Villa Selvóso. But the two pairs of eyes glistened and two pairs of hands trembled as they took up first one toy and then another, hardly knowing with which to play when the choice was so great.

Bors was so deep in a steam engine at last, and Dodo in the doll's house which moved on wheels, that they did not notice Dulcie dance away on tiptoe. About a quarter of an hour afterwards Father Ben's head appeared at the door, and Father Ben's voice invited them in a mysterious whisper to come up stairs.

"It's the secret!" said Bors to Dodo in an awe-struck voice. She nodded back to him, and they stole away on tiptoe after Father Ben.

He knocked at the door of what Dulcie called her

"tumble room," a mere box where everything was in a litter, and which no one ever tried to straighten. Muffled peals of laughter came from inside this room. Father Ben took the answer for granted, and flung open the door.

Bors and Dodo gave a scream of delight, for, sitting upon a chair in majestic beauty, which even his masquerading dress could not hide, was a magnificent S. Bernard of the true breed. Large and well-built with powerful paws, tawny as a lion, with a darker mark down the centre of his back and beautiful dark, long, silky ears, a splendid feathery tail, and the extra claw in his foot, which all real S. Bernards have to help them to dig up the snow and find the people buried underneath it.

"Keep quiet," said Dulcie, shaking her head, and holding up her forefinger to him, "be good. Don't move."

For the great tail was wagging at the sight of the children and the great eyes turned beseechingly to Dulcie, asking permission to be allowed to get down and greet the new comers. For, at the home from whence he had so lately come all strangers were welcomed hospitably, generously, kindly, and it did not seem right to him that he should be sitting upon a chair when new faces came in sight.

And his little mistress had crammed his huge paws into one of Father Ben's left-off coats, and had placed a hat, rakishly, upon one side of his dear yellow head. In

his mouth he held the handles of two straw baskets, and Dulcie was trying to make him keep a pipe there at the same time. It was difficult, but he did his best to please her.

"You dear old thing," said Dulcie, patting his forehead.

"Now let Bors and Dodo take their baskets, and then you shall get down."

The two children then noticed that each basket was labelled with a name, Bors upon one, Dodo upon the other. Doggie was only too glad to give them up, the brother and sister sat upon the floor to open them, while Dulcie whisked off the hat and coat and bestowed a rewarding hug upon her patient pet.

A box of bon-bons and a knife—not new, perhaps it had belonged to Father Ben when he was a boy—but of the best Sheffield make, and over which Bors's eyes glistened, and his fingers were in danger of being cut, so often was it opened and re-opened. In Dodo's basket was a box of bon-bons and a small desk fitted up with everything that she could possibly want. It was hard to say which present gave the greatest delight.

Kisses and thanks were given, and then the beautiful dog came in for his share of the attention and caresses. He stretched himself out by the side of his little mistress, while, with her arms round his neck, she told his story.

How, a year ago, Father Ben went up to the monastery of S. Bernard to do some work for the church, and

he never took any money for work he did for the church. And how Dulcie went with him, she always went everywhere with Father Ben, and when they were coming away the monks said that some day or another they would have something to send her. But this happened a year ago, and she thought they had forgotten, when one day a gentleman called and brought this beautiful dog. Round his neck was tied a parchment label.

"Fetch it please, Father Ben," she cried, somewhat imperiously.

"My lady must be obeyed," he said, smiling. And produced the label.

> To dear little Dulcie,
> From the Monks
> of S. Bernard.

"And I've called him *Bernard*, because the monks of S. Bernard gave him to me," she said, in conclusion.

"You have not told us what your secret has to do with church," said her father.

"He went to church this morning. But you must not scold him, for I scolded him well, and he never means to do it again," and Dulcie shook her head.

"To church! Oh, Dulcie. I thought he was safely shut up when you were at church," and Father Ben looked serious.

"So he was, Father Ben! But I let him out, and told him he must stop quietly at home, because I was going to church. I thought the monks would have brought him up to know that doggies are not allowed at church. And after all he pushed the church door open, and came right up to me. And oh! Father Ben, I nearly rolled over upon the floor when I felt his cold nose."

Ben could not help laughing any more than Bors and Dodo.

"We must teach him to wait outside," he said, when he had recovered his gravity; "then he can go. And now, little people, it is time for dinner."

CHAPTER VI.

BORS CHANGES HIS MIND.

AFTER dinner, when the two little girls were sent up stairs to lie down and rest until the early tea, then came the hour in the day that Bors liked best of all.

The sign-board outside, over the door of Father Ben's house, said that "Benedict Cramer" was "a working jeweller," but it did not say how famous he was in his trade, and how well-known amongst those of his own craft as being the best setter of stones of his day. This was why he so often went away for several months at a time to most of the principal cities of Europe in turn. He frequently was sent for from Paris, Vienna, and Brussels to re-set jewels which were too costly and too precious to be entrusted to him in any other way. They could not be carried to him even by a faithful messenger, and he had to go to them. Dulcie always accompanied him upon these expeditions. "My lady" rather enjoyed

her outings than otherwise, and I think I may fairly venture to say that she had travelled more and seen more places than any other young lady of her age of whom I have ever heard.

So after dinner Ben settled down to his work with Bors by his side watching. He wondered over and over again how those big fingers of Father Ben's could deal so gently with such tiny stones, could twist and turn the slimmest fragment of gold wire to any shape at will. To-day he was replacing some missing stones in a locket —a sapphire heart, encircled with several rows of diamonds, and what stone could be more appropriate out of which to fashion a heart? Deep, and clear, and true, and changeless as the GOD Who made it. From out of its brilliant, quivering, flashing setting it shone steadfast, faithful, pure—just what a heart should be.

In silence for some minutes Father Ben's work proceeded, Bors's eyes following every movement of those strong fingers which held the sparkling stones. The fascination of it was so great, that Bors would have been content to let the whole afternoon slip away thus, when it occurred to him that he and Dodo had made up their minds to ask Father Ben a question which had been worrying them for some time. They were accustomed to go to him for a solution of any of their difficulties, and even an *extra* hard piece of lesson was saved for him. He had begun to teach Bors Latin, and set him exercises to write and portions to learn until he next

came into Florence, when these exercises were corrected and the portions repeated. But to-day, it was agreed upon all sides, was to be wholly one of pleasure, and that was why Father Ben was hastening to finish his heart, that he might take them to the gardens to hear the band play.

Bors squared his elbows and nursed his chin in the palms of his two hands. Then he said,

"Father Ben, I want to ask you a question."

"Ask away," said Ben. "I can talk and work together generally, but if I come to any ticklish bit and don't answer you just at once, you'll understand?"

"Yes," said Bors, "and I won't talk until the 'ticklish bit' is over. You are getting on all right now, Father Ben?"

"In smooth water for the present. So now is your time for asking."

"When father and mother died, we went in to kiss them and say good-bye. Father said, 'Be a brave boy,' and mother said, 'Be good children.' Now Dodo and me often talk about it, and we can't make out what it is to be *good*. Does it mean the same as being *brave*?"

"No," said Ben, "they are not the same. You can be brave without being good, but I do not think you can be good without being brave. Good people are always brave, at least I have always found them so. Bravery is only another name for fearlessness. Vigorous health and a stout heart might make a man naturally brave. But if

you are good of what *can* you be afraid? A child who has hold of his father's hand does not fear though the night may be dark and he cannot tell where his father is leading him. And the great King has hold of our hands and is leading us Himself every step of the way. Of whom or of what shall we be afraid if GOD is with us?"

It was talking over Bors's head, and he did not quite understand. He waited a minute, then asked humbly,

"And what does it mean to be *good*?"

"It's easy enough," said Ben, "as I've been taught it. It's no use muddling people's brains and telling them they are not to do this thing or that thing, and they *may* do this thing or that thing. Years and years ago, long before you were born"—the sad look deepened in eyes, and mouth, and voice—"I heard something in a church that has lasted me all my life, and I will tell it to you and perhaps it will last all your life also."

"Yes," said Bors, breathlessly.

"Well, then. To be good means only to be *like the good God.* Set every thought aside and put this first before all others. To be good is to be *like the good God.* To act as GOD would act, to speak as GOD would speak, to think as GOD would think. To say to yourself the very first thing in the morning, 'To-day I am going to try to be as much like GOD as I can possibly be. And ask Him to help you."

"But GOD lives in heaven," said Bors.

"Yes, *now* He does. But for thirty-three years He lived in this world, and did just the very things we do, *except* that He never did anything wrong. Now think of GOD as being a Boy about your own ages. When He was a Boy He learnt lessons and played about with other boys. When He grew older He worked at a trade, was obedient to His parents, and all the years of His life ate, and drank, and slept, and talked, and walked about among people as we do. Surely you know that, Bors?"

"Yes," said Bors, nodding. "But please go on. Tell me what you think GOD would have done if He had been like Dodo and me?"

"That is right," said Ben, approvingly. "You've got the idea. What you have to do in any doubt is to say to yourself, 'What would GOD do if He was Dodo or me?' The answer is easy enough now. He would learn His lessons—obey His aunts—play His games, and keep His temper if He did not always win."

Bors's face grew scarlet, every hair on his head seemed to be standing on end, his eyes dilated, and he spoke ashamedly.

"I'll try and not mind when Dodo beats me. I—I do get cross sometimes when she does. I don't like being beaten by a girl, you know."

"But I suppose girls may like to win as well as boys," said Ben, smiling. "I am sure GOD would think so."

"You are sure He would?" inquired Bors, anxiously.

"Quite sure."

"Then *I* won't mind," said Bors manfully. "Now, Father Ben, what else would GOD do?"

The ticklish bit had come, the settling of one of the smallest diamonds into the little gold house which was in future to be its home, and the answer had to wait some minutes. But Bors was not restless. He nursed his right leg, a habit he had when he was thinking, and watched those big fingers and that tiny stone.

"GOD never was in a hurry," said Ben at last. "If things He wanted did not come quite so soon as they might have done, He did not try to make them come sooner by going after them. He *waited.*"

If Bors could have seen through that thick moustache he would have seen the faintest of smiles lurking round the corner of Ben's mouth. There was some difficulty in his work just then, and he bent over it. When he looked up again the silence had not been broken, and he only saw, not the square, earnest, sensible face and the beautiful brown eyes, but the back of a bristly head and the tip of a rosy ear.

"Father Ben," said a muffled awe-struck voice, "how *can* you tell what boys and girls talk about when they are ever so far away?"

Ben was startled.

"Why *of course* I can't," he said. "How could you imagine such a thing, Bors? You are talking nonsense."

"No I am not," said Bors, raising a poppy-coloured face. "But didn't you know that we—that's Dodo and me—are going to England, not to-morrow but the day after."

"I certainly did *not* know it," said Ben. "Why should I? You never told me. And who is going to take you? Are your Aunts going?"

"No," said Bors, calmly. "We were going by ourselves—Dodo and me. But we can't go now, if that is what being good means."

"I should think *not*. And the absurdity of the idea. Starting off for England without knowing the way, without money—"

"No, Father Ben," corrected Bors. "Not without money. We've got two *whole* ten-shilling bits."

Ben laughed at the emphasis upon the *whole*, as if they could possibly be in *halves*.

"Those two ten-shilling bits would be gone almost before you could say 'Jack Robinson,'" said Ben. "And what then?"

"We thought they would last some time," said Bors. "And then we meant to tell the railway people we were going to Uncle Jack, and that he would pay for us."

Ben could not help laughing heartily.

"And instead of getting to Uncle Jack, you would have been like the babes in the wood, only worse off than they were perhaps. Bors"—and Ben grew quite

grave—"I am very glad we had this talk together. You did not know what you were thinking of when you made up your mind to start for England. It was silly as well as wrong."

This was so kindly said that Bors could not mind, even though "babes in the wood" and "silly" hurt his dignity a little. You see Ben wanted to prevent anything of the sort ever happening again.

"How did you guess?" he asked, after a minute's silence.

"I did not guess much," said Ben. "I only knew that ever since you told me about your Uncle's first letter, inviting you all to go and live with him, there has been a difference in you."

"Just what Carlina says," said Bors, excitedly. "When I asked her the other night how you get to England, she said, 'You are not like the same children.'"

"Just so," answered Ben. "You are restless and impatient. And all the fretting in the world never alters things."

"Was GOD ever restless? Did *He* ever fret?" asked Bors.

"*Never*," said Ben with such energy that Bors was startled. "He always *waited*."

"He always waited," echoed Bors, dreamily.

"And patiently. There are two kinds of waiting. You can wait because you are *obliged* to do it, and you can wait patiently."

"Patiently," echoed Bors, in the same dreamy voice.

Another "ticklish bit," and another long silence, then Bors said in a brisk, clearing up tone,

"Then Dodo and me are to be like GOD, and wait patiently. I shall have to tell her."

"Yes," said Ben.

"That's all right," and Bors with a look of relief loosed hold of his right leg, which he had been nursing perseveringly for so long.

A few more minutes, and Ben said brightly,

"There, our talk is finished, my work is finished, and I am sure it must be tea-time."

"Let me look at it, please," said Bors.

The shining jewel with its rainbow setting was placed upon the small brown palm.

"It is the beautifullest thing I ever saw in my life," he said admiringly. "Does it cost a *lot* of money?"

"Yes, a good deal," said Ben. "The sapphire is such a large one. I could not value it. Why do you want to know?"

"Because when I grow up I should like to buy one *just* like it for Dodo."

"There will be time enough to think about that," said Ben, laughing. "Ah, here are our ladies to tell us that tea is ready."

After the gardens came supper. It was after half-past eight o'clock when Bors and Dodo turned their mules' heads homewards, and kissed their hands for a last fare-

well to Ben and Dulcie. She was in his arms, nestled there bird-like fashion, shaking her head until her fluffy hair encircled it as a golden glory, not yellow bright, but that pale golden light which is often seen in the old pictures of the Saints. So the three travellers proceeded on their homeward way, speeded by those they left behind, their pretty baskets slung to their saddles, the bells of the mules making sweet music as they trotted along. Carlo had spent just as happy a day as the brother and sister; he had had plenty to eat, and was loud in his praises of the "good Signor," and he sang them for so long, that Bors was tempted to impatience; he had so much to tell Dodo, then remembered in time, and waited.

Carlo was silenced by the fact of there being no more to be said upon the subject. Then Bors turned to Dodo, and began *his* say.

"Being good, Dodo," he said, "means being like GOD, and if you want to be like GOD, you must do what He did. Ben said that GOD never was in a hurry, and always *waited.* So you and I must wait to go to England until the Aunts go, and must not start by ourselves the day after to-morrow."

Dodo was not sorry. She would have been glad to see Uncle Jack, to fill up one of the vacant chairs, to have lessons at home, or go to school, but she had been dreading the starting for England on their own account with such a vague notion of the road they had to travel, and such a limited allowance in their pockets of a ten-shilling

bit apiece. She had no idea, any more than Bors, how far ten shillings would go, but she had less faith in its power of lasting than he had.

"We mustn't *grumble*, we must wait *patiently*," said Bors impressively, feeling that Dodo was taking the matter more quietly than she ought. "So mind you don't fret: and if you begin to talk and vex about it, I will stop you. And now I'll tell you all I can remember that Father Ben told me."

A tiny silver ribbon hung over the mountain-tops as the three travellers turned their mules up the steep path that led to the Villa Selvóso. It was past ten o'clock, the glow-worms had hung out their golden lamps, the fireflies danced a joyous dance; from the valley below came up the shouts of the little Italian children, still playing their merry antics, but above these sounds Bors and Dodo listened for one that always greeted them, the swishing of the Aunts' dresses as they swept along the terrace with slow, even steps. There was something different in the well-known sound to-night: the children noticed it, but could not make it out. Just as they were jumping off their mules, Aunt Fluff came to meet them *alone*—alone, and with flushed cheeks, wet eyes, and an unsteady voice. The news she told the children quite took their breath away. At noonday there had been a telegram from England saying that Uncle Jack was very ill indeed, and asking one of his sisters to go and nurse him. They had packed up a few things in a

hurry, and Aunt Hessie had started at once. Aunt Fluff kissed them more affectionately than usual as she sent them to bed, telling them she was sure they were tired, and that they were to rest as long as they liked in the morning. Bors and Dodo noticed this particularly, for Aunt Fluff had never remembered to say it before. But she forgot nothing to-night, not even that Sydney Reid had called there quite early that morning, and invited them both to spend the day at Villa Fornerari to-morrow. They were to go all the same, Aunt Fluff said. *This*, and her voice was quaking, was not to make any difference.

CHAPTER VII.

"THAT VERY OLD PAIR OF BOOTS."

BORS and Dodo crept up stairs feeling that they must be quiet to-night of all nights in the year, and wondering softly between themselves if the Aunts had cried very much, and thinking how sad it was for poor Uncle Jack. They had only seen him once, soon after they came to Villa Selvóso, but they remembered him as being nice and kind and bright, and it was sad to fancy him ill and in bed,—"too ill perhaps even to *speak* to Aunt Hessie when she gets there," said Bors, shaking his head.

In their bedroom was Carlina, waiting to pour everything into their ears. From her they learnt that the Aunts had both cried plentifully, and that Aunt Fluff's tears kept dropping into the portmanteau while she was helping to pack, "spoiling her clothes," and that Aunt Hessie's last words to Aunt Fluff were,

"The children will be a comfort to you."

Bors and Dodo held their heads an inch higher after that.

Carlina was sorry for her mistresses' trouble, but there was no doubt but that she liked the excitement it brought. Years had passed by so smoothly and uneventfully in that quiet household that she never had any gossip to carry down to the valley which was her native home. And now this really was something she could tell the neighbours, and she herself would be of greater importance because of the news she bore. She gave the whole account from first to last, not omitting a single detail, in such a graphic manner, speaking partly in Italian, partly in English, that the children listened much as if it were a tale and not an event that had just happened in their own family circle, and affecting themselves very nearly.

Carlina stood with her back against the door, a hand on each hip, and when she had at last talked herself breathless, and said everything there was to be said upon the subject, she wished them a "good night and pleasant dreams," and went out of the room, or rather *rooms*, for the children had two pretty little rooms, opening one into the other.

In a minute she was back again.

"Ah," she said, nodding and smiling, "and to think that I was so nearly forgetting what a charming surprise I have for you. It is true that that sad trouble of the

dear ladies has put every other thought out of my head. But wait a moment, and you shall see."

She returned beaming, carrying in each hand a little white angel, with outspread wings and folded palms, made of plaster of Paris, such as may be seen hawked about in the streets in any large town in England.

"There," she said triumphantly, "my heart has ached for you many a day, you poor children, with no angel over your head. Down in the valley there is never a *bambino* but has an angel to watch it while it sleeps. Now these will hang over each of your beds. And shall I tell you how I got them? Why, easily enough. I was walking in the garden to ease my mind of this great trouble, when I heard a voice. Ah! but it startled me. I looked round, and there, sitting upon the wall by the grove you love to repose in, was a man I have known ever since I was, ah, no higher than that table. His name it is Signor Vestiti. And he had a whole basket full of images, S. Francis, S. Joseph, and oh! more than I could tell the names. And then of course, as I had known him ever since I was no higher than that table, I had a talk with him, and I told him of our trouble. And he listened with such patience, and then just as he was going away he said, didn't I want any of his goods to-day? And I said I had no money—none—for all my wages go almost as soon as they are in my hand. Then he showed me a bag, and he said that he would take old clothes, very old clothes, which were of no use to any

one, in exchange. And he took in his hand these two dear angels, and he said, 'Of course the little lady and little gentleman had some like these.' And when I shook my head, he held up his hands in *such* surprise. Well, I went away, and left him sitting upon the wall, while I looked in that cupboard where there are so many old things, and I thought perhaps I might find something that he would take in exchange for these nice new angels. And then I saw an old, old dress of Miss Dodo's—"

"It was too old to mend again," said Dodo, "and I stuffed it in there because I did not know where to put it. I like my Angel better," and she looked to see if there was a nail over her bed where she could hang it. There was one. Carlina had not forgotten the nails.

"And that pair of very old boots."

"Oh——oh——oh——o—h——oh!"

The yell, I can't call it anything else, that broke from the two children, made Carlina give a startled backwards leap almost into the passage. It rang out through the open window, and was borne some way upon the night air—a cry of mingled pain and anger. The birds heard it, wondered if it was morning, opened one eye, and satisfied upon that point, tucked their heads underneath their wings again. But Aunt Fluff, sitting in her bedroom at the other end of the Villa thinking of Uncle Jack and Aunt Hessie, did not hear it.

Bors's first impulse was to fly at Carlina, and pommel her *well.* It was such a dreadful loss. How those children had treasured their golden bits, none but themselves knew. Remember that they were not like children to whom money came, even in small quantities, often. Those two ten-shilling bits had been sent as a Christmas present from Uncle Jack, the only money they had ever had since they came to Villa Selvóso. And they had hoarded up those golden pieces, not in a miserly fashion, but because they had so many wants, and they could not make up their minds which want was the most *wanted.* And now that cherished bit of gold was lost for ever! Rammed down at the bottom of a sack, piled high with lots of old clothes, Bors saw his bright new piece of gold. And who could tell where that sack was now, or into whose hands "that very old pair of boots" would fall. They were a well-worn pair of boots, had been soled and re-soled so often that there was none of the original leather left, and yet one of them, if anybody only knew it, was worth its weight in silver.

It was a good-sized burden for our poor young man's back to bear, just after they had come home brimful of the pleasure of a happy day. Uncle Jack's illness slipped out of his mind for the time. He was not unfeeling, but Uncle Jack had been seen so long ago, and it was only yesterday that that golden bit had been unwrapped, gazed upon, and then carefully re-wrapped and tucked safely into the toe of one of those "very old boots." It was

after they had been talking of going to England, and he had balanced the money in his hand, trying to guess how far on their road it would take them. We think so much less of sad things which happen at a distance, than of things, perhaps not half so sad, which happen near at hand.

Bors restrained his first impulse, but not his second. He flung himself down upon the floor, rolled over and over, and kicked.

When Carlina had gathered from the tearful Dodo the mischief she had wrought, she did the best thing possible under the circumstances, and slipped out of the room. She was really sorry, but tried to satisfy herself that it was not her fault. They should find safer hiding-places. Who would think of money being put away in the toe of an old boot? And so on.

Dodo, left alone with Bors, did her very best, poor little maiden, to be a comforter—promised that *half* her ten-shilling bit should be given to him, and when he shook his head vehemently, said she did not want any of it, he should have it *all*, and then it would be just the same as if he had never—lost—his. More shakings of the head, and some almost incoherent mutterings, much interspersed with sobs, which Dodo made out to mean that he would *never*, *never* touch a farthing of the money that was hers by right. Dodo's sad heart failed her. Poor, poor Bors! would he make himself ill, ill as Uncle Jack, with crying so much. But Love, who is the

sweetest singer in the whole wide world, and who never sang a wrong note in his life, touched the right chord at last.

"Bors," said Dodo, softly, uncertainly, diffidently, "do you think GOD would be so . . . vexed? Would He mind so very much?"

In a second the conversation with Ben that very afternoon was brought back to Bors's memory by Dodo's words. Until then he had forgotten everything but the loss of that golden bit of money. He sat up now, and hugged his knees, alert and tearless.

"It *isn't* being good. Not being like GOD at all. I am glad you remembered me, Dodo."

"*What* do you think GOD would do?" asked Dodo, anxious to keep his thoughts turned in that direction.

"Shall we look in the Bible?" said Bors. "It tells us all about what GOD did there, you know. Only it doesn't say much about what He did when He was a Boy."

Morning and evening the children always read a chapter of the Bible, kneeling side by side,—no one had told them to kneel, but they never read the Bible in any other way. One time the brother read it aloud, another time the sister; the two brown heads close together, a small brown finger travelling slowly down the page to mark the place. And it was always the Gospels they read,—they were quite satisfied with them, and did not attempt any other part of the Book. They took such

interest in the GOD-Man, Who was always "doing good," and always so loving and so forgiving; He was a real, true Person to them, young as they were, and it was this, I think, which made them both able to grasp in a minute, not as if it was a new idea, the way of being good; to be like GOD, to do what GOD did, or would do. Until to-day GOD had been Someone real and true to them,—to-day He was more. Someone to copy, Someone Whose habits and ways were to be studied, not because they were so beautiful in themselves, but because they, Bors and Dodo, were meant to imitate them, were meant to do just as He did.

A few pages were turned to-night, and then Bors's finger stopped,—"Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?" He read on to the end of the chapter, and then said triumphantly,

"There, Dodo, that's it! That's GOD speaking. He says we are not to bother about our clothes, and eating and drinking. We've got plenty to eat and drink, but we do want some clothes. I'm growing out of all my knickerbockers, and my stockings have such dreadful big holes in them. With that ten-shilling bit I meant to buy some new knickerbockers and stockings. But GOD says He'll see about our clothes, so it doesn't matter in the least. When He was a boy and lived in the world, if He hadn't any money and wanted new clothes, He went without until new ones came, and

didn't mind. I've got to go without until new ones come, and *I* don't mind."

"But you see," continued Bors, "that's only meant for me, because you've got your ten-shilling bit, and *can* buy some clothes. Let us make haste, Dodo, or Carlina will be here, before we are ready, to take away the light."

By the time they were in bed Dodo was quite sorry that *her* ten-shilling bit was safe in its box. It was so hard to have no part in what made her brother so supremely happy. He was in the wildest spirits, tumbled head over heels, pelted Dodo with pillows, and only sobered down when she gravely reminded him of poor Uncle Jack ill, and Aunt Fluff left all alone.

Carlina was a great coward. Perhaps her conscience was pricking her, telling her that she ought not to exchange old things which were not her own for new images, without the consent of the owners of the old things. At any rate she was afraid to fetch away the light until she thought she had given the children time to fall asleep.

She stole into the rooms tip-toeing from one bed to the other. One light did for both of them, as the door dividing the two rooms was always flung wide open, and Bors was mid-way between the two all the undressing time. By the side of Bors's bed Carlina stood the longest, and hardly dared to draw a breath for fear she might wake him. She examined him closely, and was

relieved to find no trace of tears upon the peaceful face, no sign of anger in the wide-open sunburnt hand lying quietly stretched upon the pillow.

She gave a hasty, scared glance upwards. Yes, there hung the meek angel with the outstretched wings and folded hands. It seemed to her almost as if it was looking at her reproachfully,—so snatching up the candle in a hurry, she left the rooms quicker than she went in.

CHAPTER VIII.

"LOVE WILL FIND OUT THE WAY."

EARLY the next morning the two children held a serious meeting in the Grove. Bors was in one of his favourite "thinking" attitudes—lying prone upon the ground resting his chin in the palms of his hands, flourishing his heels in the air. Dodo sat soberly upon the stump of a tree.

The subject they were discussing gravely and seriously was this.

Aunt Fluff had been up so early this morning, much earlier than she had ever got up since Bors and Dodo had come to Villa Selvóso. From their windows they had watched her, as they were dressing—saw her pace up and down, down and up her favourite terrace-walk, with a much quicker step than usual, and once or twice they were sure they saw her—crying.

It was a great treat to the children to have the pros-

pect before them of spending the day with Sydney. The "big boy," as Dulcie called him, was a great interest to them. He opened the doors into quite a new world, and they were longing to see "the Governor," Bella and Willie, of whom he had spoken. Still, great as the treat was, and they might never have the chance again, they knew they ought to give it up, and stay at home and take care of Aunt Fluff. This was what Aunt Hessie meant when she said, "The children will be a comfort to you."

The difficulty lay in—the note. They must write to Sydney explaining matters, and as their worries and perplexities were always settled in the Grove, they went there at once this morning to consider how and by whom the note was to be written, and what was to be said in it.

When the breakfast bell rang it had been decided that, as the writing-desk belonged to Dodo, she was to write the letter, and Bors was to tell her what to say.

Aunt Fluff said nothing, and ate hardly any breakfast. The children got over theirs as quickly as they could that they might write the letter, send it off, and hasten back to comfort her.

The writing-desk was carried to the Grove. Dodo forced herself into a cramped position, her desk resting on her knees, great care being required to keep the ink from tilting over. Her pen was in her hand, a fair sheet of paper, lines underneath it, before her. Bors, who

was able to take life more easily, lay in his favourite attitude. Then Dodo said, all preparations made,

"Shall I begin, 'My dear Mr. Sydney?'"

"No," answered Bors, "why should you? he's *my* Mr. Sydney as well as yours, and the letter is to be mine as well as yours. You had better begin, '*Our* dear Mr. Sydney.'"

Some little interval elapsed before Dodo asked,

"What next?"

"It takes you a long time," said Bors. "Let me see —I think we had better say—"

The note when finished ran thus—Bors and Dodo each signing their name at the end.

"OUR DEAR MR. SYDNEY,—

"We are so sorry we can't go to spend the day with you to-day, but Aunt Fluff is very unhappy, and we have got to stay at home to comfort her.

"We are, our dear Mr. Sydney,

"BORS.

"DODO."

"It's being like GOD to stop at home," said Bors, for tears were in Dodo's eyes as she packed up the little note. "He takes care of everything, even of the sparrows, and we must take care of Aunt Fluff. She doesn't want to be fed, but she wants cheering up."

"Is it *good* to cheer up Aunt Fluff when Uncle Jack is so ill?" said Dodo, hesitatingly.

"Well, he isn't *dead*, you know," answered Bors, whose disposition was certainly a more hopeful one than that of Dodo. "And he needn't be sure to die, for perhaps he'll get quite well. Perhaps he is better now. GOD only cried *twice* all the time He lived in the world; at least, it only says He cried twice—that was once when his *great* friend died, and He didn't cry for long, for He soon made Lazarus alive again."

"What a pity it is," said Dodo, regretfully, "that we can't make Uncle Jack alive again."

"But he isn't *dead*," said Bors briskly, "and until he is dead he doesn't want making alive. We *couldn't* make him alive, and we *can* take care of Aunt Fluff and cheer her up. Come along."

Aunt Fluff was sitting in an arm-chair by the window, and as the children entered the room they saw her wipe away some tears with her pocket-handkerchief. They had had no experience of "comforting people," but they could not have found a better way if they had been old people, and had spent a whole long life in learning how to comfort those in trouble. They fetched their lesson-books, and asked her to help them. She was turning them over rather listlessly, when she came upon a Latin exercise. She was amazed to find it, and asked Bors how he could manage Latin by himself, and he said that Father Ben helped him, and explained how it was. Aunt Fluff wakened up, she and Aunt Hessie had never troubled themselves about the friends the children had

made in Florence. They were respectable, nice people, and that was enough for them. But now she asked question upon question, and seemed quite interested in Father Ben and Dulcie. Books and slates were dropped upon the floor and lay there unheeded, while Bors and Dodo talked one against the other, so delighted to find a listener to whom they could talk about Father Ben and Dulcie.

They ran off and fetched their pretty baskets, and told how the magnificent Bernard had held them so patiently in his large mouth, and how Dulcie had dressed him up such a guy, and so on. Aunt Fluff leaned back in the easy chair and fingered the presents, an amused smile upon her mouth, and just at that moment the door opened, and Mrs. Deering and Mr. Reid were announced.

Bella and Sydney looked somewhat surprised at the "very unhappy Aunt Fluff." She certainly did not seem so woe-begone as they expected from the queer little note. They had gathered from it that something was the matter, and had started at once for Villa Selvóso to see if they could be of any use.

After the first greetings were over the children carried off Sydney to their Grove, leaving Bella to talk to Aunt Fluff. They had so much to tell about the Aunts, Uncle Jack, Father Ben, and Dulcie, that it was only as he was going away that Sydney recollected a packet of needles of all sizes which he had brought in his

pocket. So many exciting events had happened since they had had their talk with him that morning, that they had almost forgotten such things as needles existed at all. So the present which had been at one time longed for and looked forward to now fell somewhat flat. But of course Sydney did not guess that, when he carefully chose the different-sized needles from Bella's work-box and made them into one large packet.

That day a telegram came from England to say that Uncle Jack was a shade better, but not yet out of danger, and could Aunt Fluff come and help Aunt Hessie in the nursing? Aunt Fluff was torn into two pieces. She could not take the children, for the house must be kept quiet for the sick man, and she did not care to leave them behind with only an Italian servant in the Villa. In this difficulty Bella stepped forward.

She only *guessed* the difficulty, for Aunt Fluff had not liked to mention it, but she asked if Bors and Dodo might stay with them for as long a time as Aunt Fluff liked. It would be very nice to have them, she said, for Sydney had taken a great fancy to them, and they would be quite companions for him. Her husband claimed her time and attention so much that she was afraid it was often very dull for Sydney. She made a favour of the request, and Aunt Fluff, who knew from experience the children were not much trouble, accepted the offer as frankly as it was made.

In a couple of days things had "turned themselves," as Bors expressed it, "topsy-turvy." Aunt Fluff was on her road to England, Bors and Dodo had taken up their abode with Mr. and Mrs. Deering, Sydney and "the Governor." Carlina was sent to her home in the valley with orders to go up every day to Villa Selvóso, and air it by opening the doors and windows, for Aunt Fluff thought it very possible that when Uncle Jack was well enough to travel, they would bring him there for change of air and scene. But for the present the Villa was shut up, silent and deserted, and the little brown faces of the Italian boys bobbed over the wall and looked in vain, then rolled down the hill more slowly and thoughtfully, and screamed rather less than usual, because they missed the sympathy of Bors and Dodo in the Grove.

The children had been only a few days at Villa Fornerari before there came another "upset" in the shape of a letter from Father Ben. Only a few hurried lines to say that he had been sent for from Paris to undertake an important work, the resetting of some valuable family diamonds, and they were upon the eve of starting; before Bors and Dodo got the letter they would be upon their way. Dulcie sent much love and a thousand kisses, and Father Ben was to be sure to say that Bernard was going with them, and said he thought he should like Paris very much indeed, and *directly* they came back to Florence, Bors and Dodo were to be sure to come at once, and spend three or four days with them. Father Ben said

so, to make up for the long time they would be away, and would not be able to see them. Father Ben added in a postscript that it might be four months, or it might be five, before they settled down in Florence again, for he thought he should have other commissions when once he was in Paris.

The children were very vexed to hear this piece of news. Apart from their love for Father Ben and Dulcie, they had excited Sydney's curiosity so much, that a day had been fixed upon when he was to ride with them to Florence, and they would have the pleasure of introducing the "big boy" to Dulcie. And five months was such a long while; where would Bors and Dodo themselves be by that time? Then there is such a blank in our world when people we love go out of it, even though we know that some day we shall see them again. This was the feeling with Bors and Dodo when they read the short letter, and sighed to think that Father Ben and Dulcie were now far, far away, and each minute that passed was taking them still further, and that before they had time to let them know what changes had happened to them. Father Ben gave no address, so they could not answer his letter.

In the midst of new friends their old ones were never forgotten, Ben and Dulcie being constant themes of conversation. And day by day was piled up in their hearts some new idea of what "being good" meant; day by day

they realised more and more what it was "to do as GOD did." To be gentle, loving, true, and unselfish, *not* gloomy or stiff, or setting yourself up to be better than other people.

One morning Dodo was standing ready dressed, waiting for her brother to go down to breakfast, and expecting the bell to ring every moment. Since they had come to stay here, and had had no lessons or work to get through, Bors had grown somewhat lazy, liked lying in bed until the very last moment, and then had to make a rush for it. Dodo waited patiently for a while and then said, diffidently,

"GOD was always in time, Bors; and you were late yesterday, and I think you'll be late to-day."

"How do you know He was always in time?" demanded Bors, sternly, pausing in the act of pulling on his stocking, "it doesn't say so anywhere in the Bible."

"It often says 'early in the morning,' and if He got up early He would be sure to be in time."

"Yes," said Bors, "of course He would; I'll say I'm sorry, and be in time to-morrow morning. Run off now, Dodo; I shall be quicker if I don't talk to you."

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CHAPTER IX.

A COUPLE OF RAGAMUFFINS.

IN one of the narrowest streets of Florence, in the old-fashioned part of the town, and in one of its meanest houses was a room,—well you could hardly call it a *room*, for it was more like a cell, just four walls, a window with iron bars across it, a piece of cocoa-nut matting, a deal board, that served alike for table and bed,—that was all. Even in this land of sunshine this room, which was on the lowest floor, was almost as dark and gloomy as a cellar in the slums of London.

And this cell might have been a palace, if you judged by the happy faces of the two boys who occupied it. They were squatting upon the piece of cocoa-nut matting, and between them was a basket filled with fresh moss, upon their left was a large sheet of newspaper covered with the loveliest sprays of flowers and green

leaves. The younger boy sat idle, watching, rather listlessly, the movements of his companion, who was making up the flowers and leaves into the most bewitching little bouquets. They were wonderful hands and wrists that moved so deftly among the flowers,—perfect in shape, slender, lissom, and exquisitely graceful. You could hardly keep your eyes off them if you saw them at work, as they lifted first one flower, then another, lightly and quickly re-arranging each leaf, those hands almost seemed to *talk*. You can see beautiful hands every day of your life, but hands like these only once in a life-time, the person who has them *must* be an artist.

And Antonio, or Tonio, as he was always called, was a real artist, though he only exercised his skill upon button-holes and little bouquets to sell about the streets. He would not have exchanged his trade for any other, he loved his work so much. Every flower that blossomed was a thing of perfect beauty to him,—he would stroke each glossy leaf and talk to them as if they were alive and could hear what he said, and make answers to him. "My lovely ladies," he would often call them, and many endearing titles that flow so smoothly and so sweetly in the caressing Italian tongue.

Tonio's history was a very ordinary one for the class from which he came. He never remembered having father, mother, brother, sister, or any relation in the whole wide world. He tumbled up, as gutter children

do tumble up, anyhow. When he was only three years old he found out that if he wanted food to eat he must earn it himself,—the idea of stealing it never entered his curly head. So those two sturdy bare legs and feet carried him wonderful distances upon messages and errands. The neighbourhood discovered that Tonio was to be trusted, that he went straight upon his errand and back again, that he never lost any of the money entrusted to him, but always brought back the right change. Of course it was not much money they trusted such a baby with, but whatever it was he kept it tightly clutched in his slim little hand, and fought any playfellow who tried to take it from him. Many a hard-worked mother was glad to give Tonio a meal in exchange for some hours of patient work, which he in his turn was equally glad to give to earn the necessary food wherewith to keep himself from starving.

This state of things went on until Tonio was eight years old, when one of his companions made him a present of a flower. His brown cheeks flushed as he sat down upon the bare earth and held the beautiful thing tenderly in his hands, kissing it, caressing it, cooing over it, talking to it. From that day his ambition grew to be a flower-boy. His fingers itched to dabble among the lovely flowers at will, to make them up into bright clusters of colour, sorting them and arranging them as his fancy pleased. He thought of them by day, dreamt of them by night, and nearly

starved himself that he might save up enough money to buy a basket and flowers with which to start. It took him many weary months, for the neighbours rarely paid him for his drudgery in coin, generally in giving him food.

For six years now he had been a flower-boy, he was well known in the streets, and by the gates of Florence, and each day that passed, since he had chosen his calling, was happier to him than the one that went before. If any passing cloud shadowed his sunny life, his flowers soon cleared it away; one morning spent among them, smoothing gently and tenderly each glossy leaf, murmuring soft words to them, set all his troubles right.

He and his basket were well known, as I said before, and many a lady would stop her carriage to buy some bouquets made up by those long, slender, brown fingers; many a gentleman would set aside half a dozen baskets, thrust under his very nose, to choose a button-hole from Tonio's basket, where the flowers lay so fresh and soft, as if they had but that moment been gathered. The rejected baskets were good-humouredly swung back again,—the ragamuffins were not jealous. Tonio was a good comrade, and when times were bad, always shared his gains with them.

Tonio was more adventuresome than the other ragamuffins. If Florence was dull, and trade at a stand-still, as of course was the case some time in the year, he

took himself off to other places, upon foot,—always however turning up in Florence again. It was his home, and his friends were there. He was not troubled with any luggage, just the rags he stood up in, his basket and clasp-knife were all his worldly goods. And as at three years old, so now at twelve, the time of which I am speaking, that sunny head had never passed a night with a roof over it, those brown curls knew no softer pillow than that made by his arms as they pressed against the bare earth or stones.

One evening late, Tonio was on his road back to Florence, after having been upon one of his yearly expeditions. He was striding along, swinging his empty basket, and whistling as he went, when he was startled by a shadow flitting across his path. His heart was in his mouth as he stood still. There was something very ghostly in the figure before him, so unlike anything he had ever seen before. A small thin figure, fair white face, light long wavy hair, and great vacant, blue eyes, staring so strangely at him. Tonio shook himself to make sure he was wide awake, when a weak, trembling voice said in pure Italian,—not the patois Tonio was accustomed to hear,—

"Please can you tell me where to find the King?"

Unearthly was the figure, and strange were the words. Before he answered, Tonio stretched out his hand and took the boy's shoulder in a firm grip. There was not much by which to hold on, merely bone, but what there

was was *real*, and much relieved, Tonio said, speaking slowly and in the purest Italian he could muster,

"You will not find the King in the country. The place to look for him is in a great city."

The child, he was not more than seven and looked about three years younger, sighed.

"I am so tired and hungry," he said, pitifully. "I am looking for the King and cannot find him. No one can tell me where He lives. The boys laugh at me for asking, and sometimes they beat me. I thought you would not beat me," he added, trustingly.

"I should think *not*," said Tonio, his blood boiling at the idea of any one being so cruel as to beat anything so small, and weak, and fragile as the child before him. "But what do you want with the King?"

"I am going to be his servant," was the answer, and a dreamy look deepened the light blue of the large eyes.

Tonio stared at him. The answer was given quite simply, evidently the child believed what he was saying.

"Servant to the King," echoed Tonio. "What sort of a servant?"

"I am going to be his page," said the child.

"What is your name?" asked Tonio next.

"Terence."

"What is your mother?"

The child shook his head.

"Haven't you got one? Where is your father?"

"Father left me and went away."

"How long ago?"

Again the child shook his head.

"I don't know," he said, dreamily. "It seems a long time."

"Weeks or months?" asked Tonio.

The child raised his eyes to the heavens. Above the mountains the new moon was showing a silver thread upon a sapphire ground.

"When father went away," he said, "the moon was broken in pieces and there was only a small piece left. Since father went away the moon has mended himself and been a whole, round moon twice. Now he is broken into a small piece again."

"About ten or eleven weeks," said Tonio, readily. "What have you lived upon all that time?"

"What people gave me."

"And that couldn't have been much, to judge by the look of you," said Tonio.

His heart went out to this forlorn little stranger. He was strong, and big, and healthy, what if he should take this poor, weak, fragile child who could not look after himself, and work for him as well? Thrown upon the world in this helpless and evidently "wanting" state, what cruel fate might not be in store for him. True there were slack times as well as full ones, and if Tonio made up his mind to take charge of Terence, it must be "for better, for worse." If he earned much they would

share and share alike, if little, why then the stranger must be served first and he be content to go without. This did not fret Tonio, he himself was accustomed to short commons, sometimes none at all, but times must be bad indeed, he thought, if he could not gather together enough upon which to feed such a scrap of a child. Then his comrades, no doubt they would grumble, perhaps ridicule, for the help he had often given them when times were bad would not be so frequent now that he had some one, besides himself, to care for.

Some one to care for! How grand it sounded to the solitary boy. It thrilled through him, warming him with the glow it brought, as he held out his hand to the deserted child, and took his small, white, boneless fingers into the firm, yet tender clasp of his strong, slender, brown ones.

And directly they got to Florence, Tonio walked his new companion off to show him to the Padre, to see what he could make of him.

The Padre never went by any other name than that of the Padre, so I cannot tell you what his real name was. He was the priest of the church in the neighbourhood in which Tonio had tumbled up, the poorest part of the town, and the only friends he had in the whole of Florence were ragamuffins like Tonio and his comrades. There were about forty of them, boys who had nothing to live upon except what they could pick up by selling flowers, pictures, or images, holding horses' heads and doing

other odd jobs. Boys who had no home, and whose only resting-place at night was, if the evenings were warm, to lie curled beneath the basin of a fountain, or in winter to seek archways, and doorways, and cuddle back far into their depths for shelter and warmth. Gutter-children, vagabonds, ragamuffins, we may call them what we will, but to the Padre they were always his "boys" or his "children."

And pain as well as pleasure, perhaps more of *pain*, they were to the poor Padre, for in the "hard times," which always came sooner or later, his heart ached for them. Going about from day to day, these ragamuffins, more pinched, more wan each hour that passed, offering things for sale and no one to buy them! He could not pass within a few yards of his threshold without coming upon one or another of his boys, a pitiful sight, and then the Padre would go home to his bare little room, whose only furniture was its tables and chairs, and ask in what way he could further deny himself that he might have more to give to the unfortunate ragamuffins. He was poor himself, but his boys were poorer.

Once a week all the year round the whole forty of his boys had supper with him,—not all together, for his room could not have held them, but in two detachments, two separate days of the week. Not a *grand* supper, you understand, but plenty of it, just as much as they could eat. The Padre was the only friend in the world these vagabonds had, these supper parties their only taste of

home. It was no wonder they dated their time from one supper to another, no wonder that whenever they met each other in the street their confidences were mostly about the supper that was past, or that which was to come. The Padre would not have deprived them of this their sole pleasure for anything, yet it cost him, plain as the meal was, so much that he often had to deprive himself in food in order that they might have enough. His clothes were threadbare, but his boys reverenced him all the more because of it. Was it not for their sakes he was shabby? Did not his cassock grow thin, in places even break into large holes, just because the money which should have bought him whole garments was spent upon setting a poor broken-down ragamuffin upon his feet again? Ah! there was no end to the wants of the Padre's boys, as he found to his cost. But then, as he said, there was no end to their gratitude either. Not one of them had ever forgotten him. Many of them had cast their lot in different cities; some of them, but *very* few, had even turned into respectable members of society, in the shape of being regularly employed; the most of them, however, were mere vagabonds still. And at every opportunity messages of love and gratitude to the Padre came from the absent ones, and sometimes something more substantial, if funds were high, in the shape of a present as well.

Then, too, in Florence, when the city was full and the boys had a readier sale for their things, every coin

they could spare was set aside and presents rained down upon the Padre in a perfect shower. They had such an odd way of giving their presents. When we want to give a present we wrap it up in paper, tie it round with string, or seal it with sealing-wax, write an inscription upon it, and send it by post, or leave it at the house of the person for whom it is intended. The little ragamuffins just took their present in their hands, not wrapped up in paper, laid it down upon the rugged, uneven stones in front of the Padre's house, gave a loud rat-a-tat-tat with their knuckles, and ran away. Not very far, for they were always watching from some nook and corner, and the Padre when he opened the door could see, though he never told them that he did, a pair of black eyes, a row of white teeth grinning from ear to ear, a brown face crinkled and seamed in every direction from silent laughter. It would have given great offence to the sender of the gift if the Padre had thanked him for it, or had even showed that he guessed who sent the presents, but at the weekly supper he made a speech, said what articles he had found outside his door, and what nice presents they were, and how did they get there?—did they glide down upon a sunbeam, or did they rain down with the rain? Then the ragamuffins—those who were the guilty ones—doubled up with laughter, and presently the whole party would be convulsed and pealing with great peals of merriment. This little farce was repeated after all the presents, and

did not lose its force by repetition. It was always as fresh to the boys as if it was a real, new joke they had never in their lives heard before. If people are inclined to be merry a little thing satisfies them.

The Padre made out not much more of Terence's history than what he had told Tonio when first they met. Father lived in a tiny house, and was out all day and sometimes all night. Sometimes he was kind and sometimes he beat him. In what part of the country the house was he could not tell. There were hills, he answered vaguely, and that was all he seemed to know. He was perfectly happy with Tonio, followed him like a dog, and did everything he was told. He would sit for hours together with a far-off look in his big, light blue eyes, and when asked of what he was thinking the answer was always the same,

"I am going to be page to the King. I am going to be the King's page."

In the streets his eyes sought every face with a quiet eagerness that often drew attention to him. It was for his sake that Tonio hired the dark little den they called their home. He was not strong enough to wander about all day long, and Tonio never let him go out alone, for idle men teased him and called him mad, if by chance he asked them where he could find the King. When Tonio was by no one molested him or said an unkind word, and Tonio's comrades were his champions also for Tonio's sake.

The first few days after he "set up a home," Tonio went about sheepishly enough. It seemed to raise such a gulf between himself and the vagabond life he had always known. Then his comrades teased him, part sadly, part good-humouredly, said he was getting a fine gentleman, and would be looking down upon *them* next. And, accustomed as he always had been to have the sky above him, Tonio himself hardly liked the change to the small, low den. But after a while, when he was accustomed to it, it became a real home to him—a haven of rest to which to look forward at the end of his day's work, a room he could call his own with some one to welcome him to it. No more seeking for stones whereon to lay his dusky head, no more opening of his eyes to the grey dawn, his hardy limbs shivering with the chilliness of a night's rest in the open air, shivering even though the grey mists might be the herald of a scorching sun. And in the winter his teeth chattered, his limbs felt aching with the cold. And now how delightful to feel that there was no need to rise before the sun, how restful to open his eyes in the quiet and peacefulness of that room; even though it was bare of furniture, was there not *Terence*, Terence sleeping his calm, serene sleep, his long, fair hair falling over and almost hiding the thin, pale, shadow-like face? For Terence had grown the darling of Tonio's life now, and was more to him even than his much-beloved flowers.

CHAPTER X.

SIGNOR VESTITI SELLS THINGS BY AUCTION.

IT is more than three years since Tonio found Terence wandering in search of the King. He has grown a little, otherwise is much the same, as fragile as ever he was. See how different he is from Tonio, as the two boys sit with the basket—fast filling with flowers—between them.

Tonio is tall, with slender, graceful limbs, his head covered with dark brown curls, is well set upon his shoulders, and he holds it firm and erect, as if he were a prince of the royal blood. His hair is darkly brown, but here and there a thread of gold runs through it. His skin is a healthy olive, the shape of his face oval, and out of it looks forth a pair of beautiful dark eyes, tender, loving eyes they are, and of a brown that matches his dusky skin and curly hair. His lips are nearly always unclosed, and when he laughs he shows teeth white and even.

I have kept him waiting a long time while I introduced him to you and told his story. But I am sure he did not mind, for when once he began those fascinating bouquets, he was engrossed heart and soul until they were finished.

It was this that prevented him from noticing, until his hands and mind were at rest, a peculiar excited look in Terence's eyes.

"What is the matter?" he asked quickly; "has any one been speaking unkindly to you, hurting you——"

"No, no," interrupted Terence, creeping close to him, and laying his light head caressingly upon Tonio's ragged sleeve. Then he whispered coaxingly,

"Tonio, should you very much mind going away from Florence?"

Tonio's face whitened to the very lips.

"Your father is here," he said, breathlessly.

"Oh no!" said Terence, shivering. "But I have seen—Ah! who should you think? *Guess.*"

"The King!" answered Tonio, smiling merrily, and his heart relieved of a load. That father of Terence's was a nightmare to him. What if he should turn up and claim the light of Tonio's life? He did not dare to think of it.

"Not the King, but—bend your head, and let me whisper it, Tonio."

Tonio bent his brown ear to humour Terence's fancy. The child breathed into it,

"The King's daughter." Then drew back his head, and looked to see what effect such a wonderful piece of news must have upon Tonio.

"That's a Princess," said Tonio, gaily. "But where did you see her, and how do you know she was a Princess?"

"I never heard of a Princess," said Terence, "but I *know* she was the King's daughter. You went away this morning when we were out."

"Only for a few minutes," said Tonio, quickly, "and I left you to sit down in a quiet street, where no harm could come to you."

"It didn't," said Terence. "But it was there I saw the King's daughter. The door was open at a house, and she was standing inside it. I watched, and then she went away, and put something on her head. And then she came out with a big man, and they went to the church. I watched them go."

Tonio looked amused. "But I want to know what made you think she was the King's daughter."

"Before she put her bonnet on she had a gold crown round her head, and it shone and shone. Her eyes were like the stars, they twinkled and sparkled. I am *sure* she was the King's daughter. No one else would wear a gold crown."

He spoke as one who had quite made up his mind, and would not be denied. And Tonio, who never interfered with his strange fancies, only said, as he stroked the fair head resting against him,

"What has that to do with your wanting to leave Florence?"

"A woman was looking after them, and she said she should miss them, and that they were going to Paris to-day."

"To Paris!" spoke Tonio, musingly. "Ah, but that's a long way. We could not walk it; we should want money to get there. I have often thought I should like to go there, but how can we manage it? I only earn enough to last us from day to day, and your clothes are so ragged, my poor Terence! I am trying to save a little to buy you some more. And your feet vex me so. They are tender and delicate, and not like mine; the rough stones cut into them. You ought to have boots to wear."

"But can we not go to Paris?" murmured Terence, the strange new light dying out of his eye, and tears dimming them instead. "Now I have found the King's daughter, I must follow her to be her page. Page to the King's daughter, Tonio."

Tonio could not bear to see Terence cry. To turn his thoughts, he answered cheerfully,

"Ah, but we *will* go, though we cannot start to-day. I wonder if we shall find Paris as big as London, and as grand. Pepino, who was once in London, told me yesterday that the people eat off plates of gold. Think of that, Terence!"

"But we shall go to Paris, Tonio," said Terence,

plucking Tonio's sleeve, and looking wistfully in his face.

"We *will* go," Tonio hastened to say, "but I must get some money and clothes. Money to take us, and clothes for you to wear. And I tell you what, Terence, Signor Vestiti is going to have a sale this afternoon at his house. He is going to sell his things like the English sell their things. I forget the word, but one person says he'll give so much, and another person says he'll give more. I don't quite know how they'll do it, but I should like to see. And if I am lucky, and get all my flowers bought, I'll take you to Signor Vestiti's, and we'll buy you some boots, if he has any. You know, Terence, if you are to be page to the King's daughter, you must wear boots."

Terence looked down at his feet, the skin was delicate and the stones really hurt them very much indeed. Tonio's feet were quite different, more like brown leather, and nothing seemed to fret them or cut into them.

"That will be nice," said Terence, smiling. "Come back quick, Tonio. I shall watch for you through the window."

Tonio nodded, and with a loving glance at him and another at the flowers as he slung the basket upon his arm, he was off down the street at a brisk rate, whistling as he went.

He was lucky that day beyond all his hopes. Three ladies in a carriage bought the contents of his basket. They were going to have a dinner-party, they said, and

the little bouquets were so tastefully arranged, they would be charming to go before the plate of each guest. Just two shillings in English money Tonio cleared, a portion of which would go towards his rent, and he *could* not—Terence's clothes in prospect even—resist the faces of two of the Padre's boys who had not sold a picture or taken the smallest coin for two whole days. He gave them enough to make them as happy as if they had had a legacy left them, and then he had in his possession just tenpence halfpenny, which would find them food for that day and the next, and buy—he hoped—Terence's boots. He went home gaily enough you may be sure, laughing to himself at Terence's surprise at seeing him back so very soon, and swinging the empty basket triumphantly upon his hand.

Signor Vestiti lived in a narrow street, at the extreme end of it in a little house which stood apart from the others and in a dirty yard of its own. Visitors had to pick their way over numberless large oyster shells and heaps of broken bottles. Signor Vestiti had a weakness for oysters, which he devoured, when he could get them, in large quantities, and threw the shells out of his window. He impressed upon his neighbours how convenient it was to have a yard where you could fling anything you did not want, but the neighbours, and especially the bare-footed ones, who suffered from many a bleeding foot in consequence, differed from him.

Tonio slung Terence, who was but a feather weight,

under one arm, and did not put him down until safe inside Signor Vestiti's house. Of Signor Vestiti you have heard before, but if you had seen him when upon his travels in search of old clothes round and about Florence, and then in the retirement of his home, you would not have known him to be the same man. When scouring the country upon "business" he wore a suit of sober brown corduroy, which he picked up somewhere in exchange for an image or two. It was threadbare in parts, but on the whole a most highly respectable suit of clothes. This was Signor Vestiti as Carlina and the people in the valley saw him.

He had an "eye to colour," he said, "no washed-out tints for him." And this eye to colour he gratified when "off business" by decking himself in any brilliant article of dress that pleased him, not troubling himself as to whether they matched or went well together. To-day, the day of his sale, he was attired in knee-breeches of blue satin—faded in parts, but a good deal of the original colour left—crimson stockings, amber-colour shoes, embroidered in silver, a bottle-green velvet coat, and a red shirt, open in front to show a large silver chain. Round the waist he had girdled himself with an amber scarf, stuck into which was a long dagger with a massive handle, which was to do duty for the auctioneer's hammer. Upon the back of his head was tilted a Turkish smoking-cap, gay with every colour of the rainbow, and finished by a gold cord and tassels. His beard was black, his

eyes fierce and glittering, and Signor Vestiti presented, decked out in this style, an imposing figure.

The room was empty, save for a table, which divided it into two parts, and behind which stood Signor Vestiti, surrounded on all sides by piles of clothes. The table served as a boundary line beyond which his customers might not pass. They crowded the space allotted to them to suffocation. Mostly women with babies in their arms, a sprinkling of young girls, whose keen, beady eyes were trying to pierce through the bales of goods to catch the glitter of a necklace, or ear-rings, or brooch. Signor Vestiti never forgot them, but he had a tantalising habit of keeping the trinkets until the last, and the girls had to wait with flushing cheeks and quick-drawn breath until their turn came. Besides these girls there were a handful, say a dozen, of the Padre's boys, and these the other customers would have been glad to have sent away, the impudent monkeys played such pranks with the steady ones, and turned everything into ridicule with their jokes and nonsense. They were in their wildest spirits to-day, for this evening all of those present at Signor Vestiti's were to have supper with the Padre. They had a spare coin or two, and would fain replenish some of their rags from Signor Vestiti's store. They were so mad with happiness that some of the people lost their tempers and boxed their ears. Much the Padre's boys cared for boxings or scoldings. The people hurt their hands much more than the hardened heads of the

Padre's boys, who grinned in return the sauciest grin, then stood on their heads and waved their heels, until those around covered up their faces for fear of a blow, and begged for mercy.

Signor Vestiti's sales were very popular, and this one was the first that had taken place where the things were to be sold, as the English sell them, by auction. They were more like social gatherings, and were to the people of Florence who attended them much the same as an afternoon tea, though of course without the *tea* if it is not Irish to say so, is to us. Everybody met everybody, and the arrangements were very friendly. The women enjoyed the rivalry, and bid for the things as if they were children at school trying for prizes.

Signor Vestiti cleared his throat, and rapped the table with the handle of his dagger, the fine steel of the blade glittering in the sunshine. Voices ceased talking, faces turned expectantly in his direction.

"Ladies and gentlemen, if you are ready—"

"We have been ready some time," interrupted a severe voice. "We are going out to dinner, and we want a suit of your best clothes. You should not keep gentlemen waiting who are going to dine with the duke—"

"Then those gentlemen should learn manners, and not interrupt a gentleman who has begun to speak," replied Signor Vestiti quickly and good-humouredly, while a maiden standing near put her hand over a saucy mouth opened ready to retort, and said entreatingly,

"Dear Detto, do be silent for a while. I am so anxious to see if Signor Vestiti has a necklace that will do for me."

Detto wriggled away, placed his hand upon his heart, made her a low bow, and said with grave politeness,

"Whatever the Signorina commands shall be obeyed at once."

Tonio and Lissa burst out laughing. Tonio recollected yesterday seeing Detto neglect the selling of his flowers to gaze open-mouthed and open-eared at a gentleman who was bowing to a lady in a carriage. Tonio was too far off to hear what was said, but he had little doubt but that Detto had mimicked the words and tone of voice to perfection.

The sale proceeded, the heaps diminished, and Signor Vestiti held in his hand a pair of little boots. Worn down at the heel, patched at the toes, some of the holes torn in lacing, the leather dull, yet, as Signor Vestiti took care to point out, the boots had been good ones *once.*

"They are English boots," he said impressively, "and the English always buy their boots at the very best shops. The lady who sold them to me told me they were bought at the shop where the shoes of the royal children are bought."

"The lady told *me* more than she told you," remarked a saucy voice. "She said that that very pair of boots were worn by the King's son, and he only left them off

because they were too small for him. I mean to have a bid for them myself," and the ragamuffin held out a foot twice as big as the one the boots were meant to fit, hard as the hide of a rhinoceros, patterned with dirt after the fashion of mosaic work, and with a piece of Signor Vestiti's oyster shells projecting from the heel—like a spur.

Terence had been leaning against Tonio, his blue eyes fixed dreamily upon the opposite wall, but those magic words caught his ear at once.

"Tonio," he whispered eagerly, plucking softly at the rags of Tonio's sleeve, "buy me those boots, *please* buy me those boots."

Tonio took rapid measure of his foot, saw they would fit, and bid out loudly for them.

In an instant the Padre's boys were upon him, pretending to believe the boots were for himself.

"Isn't he a *gentleman*?" said one.

"Doesn't he hold his head high?" from another.

"It will be Signor Tonio this and Signor Tonio that," from a third.

"He will be bowing to us from his carriage next," from a fourth.

"Signor Tonio, honour me with your custom," sang out two or three with one voice.

Tonio laughed and listened anxiously. One paolo, 5¼d. in English money, was the utmost he could spare. Would any one bid higher?

No one did, and Signor Vestiti proceeded to ratify the bargain with a knock of the dagger, heaving a sigh and trying to squeeze out a tear.

"It is making a present of them, Tonio. You must pick me out your best bouquet to-morrow morning."

Tonio nodded assent, and tried to make his way through the crowd to the door. The heat of the room was growing unbearable, and he was afraid for Terence. The jokes of the Padre's boys followed him so far as he could hear, and he gave back answer for answer now that the boots were safe in his possession.

Terence hugged his boots tightly in his arms, repeating every now and again, in a musing voice and with a dreamy look in his eyes,

"Worn by the King's son. Tonio, did you hear they were worn by the King's son?"

It would not be the slightest use to tell him that the boy who said those words was joking. He would not understand what the word meant, and Tonio merely nodded and laughed, but that was quite enough to content Terence, who went along crooning softly to himself. When they got home he placed the little boots reverently side by side in a corner of the room, and sat down to gaze his fill upon them, his dreamy eyes seeing as through a soft mist, his thoughts in a fairyland of his own creating.

CHAPTER XI.

KING'S GOLD.

IT was not yet time to start for the Padre's supper party, indeed it wanted a long hour, and Terence still sat before that old pair of boots as if they held him in a spell. Was he not going to be "page to the King's daughter?" and it seemed to bring that happy time nearer when he could stretch out his hand and touch a pair of boots that had been worn by the King's son. Not that Terence could have put his thoughts into this shape and form. He was *happy*, and that was all he knew about the matter.

And his happiness made Tonio happy, though he guessed that those boots would never be put to the use for which they were bought. He noticed the awestruck expression of the child's face, the reverential way in which he stretched out his hand and touched them. Tonio, lying on his back upon the deal board, his fingers

twined above his head, his ragged sleeves pillowing his brown curls, watched every action of Terence's, unseen, unthought of by him.

Saw the thin, white fingers hesitatingly take hold of a boot, press back gently the lining, the blue eyes fixed, the spare figure motionless. Saw the fingers move further forward and fit themselves into the toe, then heard them come into contact with something that rustled.

Saw the blue eyes raised with a frightened look, the fingers drawn back, and the boot dropped upon the floor.

Saw the boot picked up at once, and, as if some great damage had been done to it, stroked and cuddled as though it were a kitten.

Saw, after a minute's hesitation, the fingers, tremblingly, eagerly seek the inside of the boot, and after a short tussle make their re-appearance with a square-sized packet of paper held in them.

"Boots were too big for the little gentleman, and he tucked in that bit of paper to make them fit;" and a smile hovered on Tonio's scarlet lip, and lighted his brown eyes as he thought delightedly that it was the very thing he would have done himself. It seemed to him that little bit of paper was a bridge between gentlefolks and ragamuffins, when he could think of them as acting as he would have acted, of having in some slight degree the same ideas and feelings as he had.

Terence looked upon the paper with different eyes. Everything belonging to those boots was sacred to him.

He unfolded a square of paper, smoothed it out carefully, then another, then a third, then a fourth, and lastly there lay in his hand a shining piece of gold.

Terence was not in the least surprised. He smoothed it as if it had been another piece of the paper, held it upon his outstretched palm, and said, "King's gold."

Tonio had raised himself upon his elbow, and was speechless at first from mere astonishment.

"It's English money," he said at length, when he had examined as far as he could, for Terence would not let it go, "and worth a *great* deal."

"It's *King's* gold," said Terence, positively, while he shut his hand firmly upon it, and turned his back again to Tonio to examine the other boot, but there was no King's gold in the toe of that one.

Tonio was puzzled how to act. I have said he was as honest as the day, and he never dreamed of keeping the money. It belonged, of course, to the owner of the boots, for Tonio knew enough of Vestiti to be sure that he would find safer hiding-places for his treasures, and would not be so forgetful of them. He thought it would be best to take the money to the Padre, and ask him what they should do. But then how to get the money? He would not wrest it from him by force, and it was very doubtful if Terence would ever give it up. Like most weak people, he clung to an idea as a limpet to a rock. Tonio considered the matter, and tried an innocent stratagem.

"Terence," he asked, "is that King's gold?"

"Yes, yes," said Terence, and squeezed the piece tighter in his hand.

"Then you must not keep it. The King will want his gold back again."

Terence looked doubtful. "I am going to be page to the King's daughter," he said. "I'll give it to the King then."

"We must save up money before we can start for Paris, and the King will want his gold at once," said Tonio.

Terence's large, vacant, blue eyes wakened into life at these words.

"Where is he? Do *you* know, Tonio? Let me go to him, and I will give him his gold at *once*."

"No," said Tonio, "I do not. But the Padre knows a great many more things than we do, and if we give him the King's gold, he will send it back where it came from."

"The Padre shall tell me where the King lives, and I will take it to him," said Terence.

"But," argued Tonio, "the King lives ever so far away, and perhaps that gold will have to be sent by post. The post travels so much quicker than we should go. It is better to let the Padre send it, and then we must save up our money to set off for Paris to see the King's daughter."

"Yes, yes," answered Terence, quickly, "let the Padre send it;" and laying the gold in Tonio's hand, he thought

no more about it, but gently put the little boots back into their corner, his face flushed with eagerness and excitement.

"It is time to start for the Padre's," said Tonio, and hand in hand they set off together.

They were not alone for long, ragamuffins turned up at every corner, until the whole party of them, near upon twenty-five, met together, and walked, or rather rollicked, in state to the Padre's house.

The door was wide open, that was welcome No. 1. They scampered pell-mell into the room, and the Padre at the head of the table with a merry smile and kind word for each was welcome No. 2.

It was an odd supper party, and the guests were of the liveliest. The presents the Padre had had that week, (it had been a good week for some of them evidently,) eight or nine in all, were mentioned separately, and after the usual form. There were figs, fish, penny cakes, fruit, maccaroni, bread, sweetmeats, and a packet of coffee. It was odd that no two articles were alike, and it always happened so. The shrieks of laughter over these presents were delightful to hear, they lasted until one ragamuffin nearly choked, grew black as night in the face, and had to be shaken and patted into his proper colour again. They then devoted themselves to the business of the evening, and the plentifully spread table was soon as clear, of everything except crockery, as if a cloud of locusts had walked over it.

Then came more fun, the Padre joining in and enjoying it hardly less than his boys. With grave faces the ragamuffins would relate some terrible piece of mischief, but the twinkling black eye at once told the secret —that there was not a word of truth in the story—then the Padre would pounce upon the offender or offenders, and that was the signal for a regular romp, a sort of siege and defence in which every one took part. It was well the Padre's furniture was scanty and strong, for anything in the shape of ornaments would have been shivered to atoms in no time.

At ten o'clock exactly they all turned out, not to their homes, poor ragamuffins, for the Padre's was their only home, but to their sleeping places. To-night Tonio and Terence lingered behind the others, and Tonio, the King's gold in his hand, recounted the history of it.

A smile, part tender, part amused, played round the Padre's mouth as he listened. Signor Vestiti was well known to him, and the story of the shining piece of money was revealed to him as plainly as if it had spoken. The boot was chosen as a hiding-place for his treasure by a child and that child a boy. In his absence Signor Vestiti had paid a visit, and the servant, thinking the boots old and worthless, had bartered them for an image. Then a pitying look swept away the amused one as the Padre thought of the child's grief when he found his treasure gone. For a minute or two he mused in silence, then he spoke in a low voice to Tonio, for they were

standing a little apart from Terence who, as was usual, had fallen into a dream of his own.

"The first thing to-morrow," he said, "I will try and find out the owner of this piece of money, and I will send for you and let you know what I have done about it;" and Tonio took Terence by the hand and went home with a light heart.

Early the next morning the Padre was on his way to Signor Vestiti's house, when he met that gentleman, starting on his travels—dressed in his sober, threadbare, rusty brown suit, his face unwashed, his beard and hair uncombed, and a case of images slung before him.

"Good morning, Vestiti," was the Padre's greeting. "Still at your old trade. You find it pays you well."

"Not so, Padre," Vestiti hastened to say, "I can only just scrape along,—cannot even do that sometimes," and with a loud sigh he pushed one knee forward, where a patch showed on one side and a small hole on the other. "You can see for yourself," the knee plainly said, "how shabby I am, and that I cannot be making money when I wear clothes like this."

If the Padre noticed the action he did not give any sign, but merely remarked, "Sometimes good times, and sometimes hard times. We must take life as it comes, and perhaps we should not value the good times so much if it was not for the hard ones. Is it not so, Vestiti?"

Vestiti coughed doubtfully.

"For my part, Padre," he said, "I should be quite content to have all good times and no hard ones."

"Ah, by the bye," said the Padre, carelessly. "Some of my boys were at your sale yesterday."

"The impudent monkeys," said Vestiti, but not unkindly.

"They are *boys*," said the Padre, "and have good spirits. They don't mean any harm. The things you sold them were very dear, Vestiti."

"*Dear!* Oh, no, Padre, you are mistaken. If the things were *dear*, they were not bought of me, but of some one else. I make nothing worth mentioning selling them that English way."

"There was a pair of worn-out boots. Those boots were hardly fit to *give* away."

"No, no, Padre, those boots were *cheap*," said Vestiti, "and if it had not been that my heart is very soft where Tonio is concerned—he is a beautiful boy, Padre,—I should not have let them go for so little money. Those were *real* English boots, Padre, and every one knows the English make their goods so strong that they never wear out. *Real* English boots. And I bought them of a little English gentleman who lives among the hills yonder at Villa Selvóso, where there is a friend of mine who is servant. The little gentleman was so sorry to part with them, that he shed a few tears. But they were wiped away by the sight of the beautiful images he had in their place."

The Padre's eyes twinkled. No doubt the child cried, not a few but many tears, when he found his boots disposed of. If Vestiti had only *looked* inside those boots—but then Bors would never have got his golden bit back again.

"English goods wear out as well as Florentine," answered the Padre, smilingly. "But my boys pay you too much, Vestiti; try and let them have the things for less than other people another time. Remember how poor they are, and do them a kindness if you have the chance."

"I will, Padre, I will," said Vestiti, his heart touched by the Padre's earnestness; "and to show you that I am true in what I say, I will send you a few clothes I have by me, and you can give them to your boys."

"Thank you," said the Padre. "But had I not better call for them at your house, Vestiti? You may forget."

A vision of the oystershell and bottle-strewed yard rose before Vestiti's eyes as he said hastily, "No, no, Padre, I will not forget. I would not trouble you to come to my house. I will pack them up to-night, directly I get home. I will not forget."

And in terror lest the Padre really should look him up, Vestiti did *not* forget, as he otherwise would have done. The clothes were left at the Padre's, very few in number, and those not worth much, but the Padre and his boys were grateful for *anything*.

When the Padre arrived at Villa Selvóso, the windows and doors were wide open, and the place empty, save of Carlina's brother, who was mounting guard in the verandah. From him the Padre learned that the little English gentleman and lady were staying at the Villa Fornerari, nearly half a league further on.

It was the hottest part of the day, and the poor Padre was not much inclined to continue his walk. But the golden bit must be restored, and there was nothing for him but to press on.

The children were out, but Mrs. Deering was at home, and the Padre was shown into a room so cool and shady that it was a treat to drop into a large, green leathern armchair,—a luxury unknown to the Padre,—and rest his tired limbs.

After all it was not Bella who came to him first. She was busy, and sent Sydney, so that the stranger might not be kept waiting. Sydney, who still clung to his phrase-book, tucked it under his arm, and walked into the room. The "good morning" greetings were easily exchanged, and Sydney, feeling his Italian was progressing fast, sat himself down and kept his ears well open.

The Padre told a long story, speaking rapidly, gesticulating freely with his large hands, and quite taking for granted from Sydney's manner that he understood Italian perfectly. His story finished, he produced a ten-shilling piece from his pocket, placed it triumphantly

upon the table in front of Sydney, and waited for him to speak. Finding no answer come, he started off more rapidly than before, and using more impressive gestures.

When Bella entered the room and took in the state of affairs, she nearly burst out laughing. The poor Padre, perfectly exhausted from the long walk, the heat of the sun, and his rapid talking, was leaning back in the arm-chair wiping his crimson face with a cotton pocket-handkerchief, yellow ground spotted with red. Sydney seated at the table, his phrase-book open upon it, was gazing with the most solemn and perplexed expression, first at the book, then at a piece of gold lying before him.

His face cleared when Bella came in, and he gladly offered her his seat. When she had heard and translated the story to him, he was for rushing off at once to fetch Bors, but she stopped him and said there was no hurry, for she could not think of allowing the Padre to return to Florence in the heat of the day. He must stay with them, and go back in the evening when it was cool and pleasant.

The Padre accepted the invitation with such undisguised delight, that Bella and Sydney rather wondered. They did not know how rare such kindness was to him. They guessed he was tired, and guessed aright, but how could they know that a cup of weak coffee and a slice of coarse bread had been his only food that day? Those weekly suppers were such a pull upon him, and he was

so busy attending to his boys that he did not get much to eat himself.

And such a day as that turned out to be the Padre had never spent before. Hitherto he had always waited upon others, now every one tried who could do him most honour. Sydney spent a whole hour in the steaming kitchen cooking a *fricassée* of chicken for which he was famous, and afterwards in making for dessert a strawberry ice-mould with an American machine for ices, which had only just been introduced into Europe and was not much known. Willie threw his pressed plants to the winds, and trotted off to mix a delicious claret-cup. Bella arranged fresh flowers for the dinner-table. Mr. Reid, while the others were busy, sat down by the Padre's side and talked to him. Bors and Dodo went from one to another, lending a helping pair of feet if anything was wanted from upstairs or down. And in the cool evening, just before the Padre went away, Bors made tea. He had always made it at Villa Selvóso, and sometimes he did it here. Everybody agreed that no tea was so good as that of Bors. Perhaps the reason he was such a capital tea-maker was that it was such an important business to him that he gave it his whole attention. Sydney loved to tease him during the operation, but Bors never relaxed his grave and steady care. The right number of spoonfuls, to a grain, were measured out, the water was just boiling, but not boiling over, or Bors would not use it; the teapot was covered

up at once, and the tea poured out exactly ten minutes from the time the tea was put in. Bors kept an anxious eye on the clock, and was not a minute too soon or a minute too late.

The Padre had never tasted tea before, and he enjoyed the fragrant flavour so much that he had—ah, well, I don't know if I *ought* to mention it, but then Bors was so proud, as it showed his tea-making was appreciated, that I think I must—he had *seven* cups. It is only fair to add that the cups were a *dainty* size, and not *big* ones.

Who enjoyed that day the most is hard to say, but I suppose the Padre. Florence was not his native country,—he had been sent there to work when he was first ordained, and he had not found in that great city any friends, except his boys. And, living as they did so near his heart, occupying so large a portion of it, it is not surprising that he *spoke* about them, and the sympathy with which every one listened to him, Bors, Dodo, and Bella acting as interpreters, brought tears many times that day to the Padre's eyes—tears of joy you may be sure, not of sorrow. He had struggled on doing the best he could for his boys, and leaving the rest to GOD, never dreaming of complaining of his loneliness, but the tender sympathy of these kind friends was none the less sweet and beautiful to him now that it *had* come.

They on their side were won by the Padre's simple

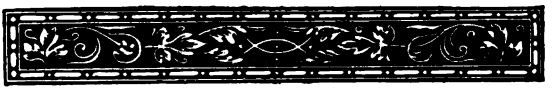
unselfishness, and were equally delighted with him. They all turned out to walk part of the way home with him. He almost staggered underneath a big bundle which he carried upon his head, and beneath which his broad face beamed, crimson with the exertion and happiness and overflowing with smiles. He would not hear of a mule for the bundle, and was only too glad to carry it. It contained treasures as dear to him as was Aladdin's lamp to its owner. Left-off clothes of Mr. Reid's, Willie's, and Sydney's, everything upon which Bella could lay hands which were done for, and many others which were *not*. But she was easily forgiven when it came to be found out.

Down the sloping hill-side, along the narrow path, underneath brawny chestnuts, and through interlacing fig-tree paths, leaving on high the Villas rosy with the good-night kisses of the sun—passing humbler dwellings, their shabbiness hidden by the tender, green dresses of the creeping vine, down into the valley, out again into the open air, and then good-night and all good wishes to the Padre. He went off, looking after them as far as he could see them, steadying the bundle upon his head, while he searched for his yellow cotton handkerchief. His pockets were better lined than they had ever been before, lined with gold that was to do such wonderful things—set I don't know how many ragamuffins upon their feet again, and furnish a treat the like of which they had never seen. And you may be quite sure that

Bella had not forgotten, or Mr. Reid either, to send a special gift to Tonio and Terence.

Life was never again the same to the Padre. And always, in years to come, when he thought of the day spent in that little Villa upon the hills, tears would come into his eyes, and he would murmur under breath, "Il Paradiso."

People often want to know what heaven is like. Who can tell? But in the moments when you are most intensely happy, pause for a second, multiply your present happiness by tens of thousands, give your thoughts wings, and let them soar—it will not make you *less* happy, but perhaps *more* so—into the bright depths of heaven, and pause, if it is only while you can say the words, to murmur as the Padre murmured, "Il Paradiso."



CHAPTER XII.

"THE BEST OF FRIENDS MUST PART."

BORS'S bright, new ten-shilling bit, which he had thought gone for ever, had come back to him again. During the excitement of the Padre's visit he had had no time to puzzle over it, but the following day found him unusually thoughtful, unusually silent.

He did not unburden his mind until late in the day. Then he called Dodo into his room, shut the door after her, and—mysterious proceeding—bolted it.

He took up his favourite position upon the hearth-rug, face downwards, and waving his heels in the air.

"What is the matter?" at last said Dodo, finding she was expected to speak.

"Oh, nothing," answered Bors, airily. "Don't you think there is a good deal in the Bible about *giving* away?"

Dodo's forehead worked into creases before she an-

swered. She was trying to remember what she had read.

"Yes," she replied at last, "there *is*. I recollect *now*. There is a great deal about *giving*."

"GOD was always *giving*, wasn't He?" said Bors, thoughtfully. "Feeding hungry people, giving blind people eyes, and lame people legs. We couldn't give people arms, or legs, or eyes. Could we, Dodo?"

"No," said his sister, positively. "We can't do that. We have only just enough for ourselves."

"That is all," said Bors. "But couldn't we give away our *clothes*, Dodo? We have more than we are *obliged* to wear, you know."

For Aunt Fluff, who seemed to have looked at everything with new eyes since Uncle Jack's illness, before she went away had noticed, not without a twinge of remorse, how dreadfully shabby her nephew and niece were. Directly after her arrival in England she sent them a box of clothes, not *grand* ones, but plenty of them, and nice, and fresh, and *whole*. No more mending for some time to come. Bors and Dodo danced a war-dance of delight over the needles, and cottons, and tape, before they put them by until they should be wanted, and that would not be for a long while yet.

There was a pause in the conversation. Dodo did not answer.

"We must have a *think*," said Bors. "Think *hard*, Dodo."

"I am," replied Dodo, briefly.

"Our clothes are ours, and they are *not* ours," was the result of Dodo's thoughts.

"They are ours, because we wear them," answered Bors. "Nobody else is wearing them."

"Yes, but I don't think Aunt Fluff meant us to *give* them away," said Dodo, thoughtfully.

"Then if she didn't, it would be a sort of *stealing* if we gave them away?" questioned Bors.

"I suppose so," said Dodo, "but it's a *hard* think."

"Very hard," replied Bors. "But my ten-shilling bit *is* my own, my *very* own?" Dodo nodded assent.

"I made up my mind that it had quite gone, and now it has come back when I didn't expect it; I don't know what to spend it upon. We have got all the clothes we want to wear, and a great many more besides. I shall give my ten-shilling bit to the boy who found it in my boot and gave it to the Padre."

"*All* of it?" asked Dodo, opening her eyes wide.

"Yes," said Bors. "Do you remember my pair of boots, Dodo?"

"Not that one pair exactly," said Dodo.

"They *were* so old," and Bors spoke meditatively. "I didn't know when I should get another pair, and I wore them as long as I could. They were mended *nine* times."

"Oh, *now* I remember," cried Dodo, clapping her hands, and laughing. "Father Ben had just been reading to us that book of Dulcie's, 'The Story without an

end,' and we called them, 'the boots without an end.'"

"That's the pair," said Bors. "Well, if any one bought *those* boots, they must be very hard up for boots,"—one of Sydney's phrases,—"and I shall give the Padre my ten-shilling bit for the poor boy who bought 'that very old pair of boots.'"

"There were two boys," said Dodo, "and if you give your ten-shilling bit to one, I'll give mine to the other, then they will both have the same."

Bors heaved a sigh of relief now the mighty question was settled, and they were just going off together when he suddenly said,

"By-the-bye, Dodo, you told me about getting up late, and now I've something to tell you. That's fair, isn't it?"

"Quite fair," said Dodo.

"You left some bread at breakfast this morning, and yesterday morning, and the morning before that."

"That isn't *wrong*, is it?" asked Dodo.

"It is not like GOD," said Bors, "because, when He fed the people with the lot of loaves and the little fishes, He told His Disciples to be quite sure and pick up all the pieces. So you see it would not be like GOD to leave any lying about."

"No, of course not," said Dodo. "And I will remember, Bors. I will be sure and eat all my roll to-morrow morning."

Then they went in search of Sydney to consult him

as to the best way of getting the money to the Padre. Sydney, who was a practical young man, advised that first of all, they should turn the English gold into Florentine money, as it would be so much more useful to the boys. They gave the two ten-shilling bits to his care, and he soon brought them a handful of silver coins in return for their pieces of gold.

The next day found Sydney, Bors and Dodo riding side by side upon three mules into Florence and having an interesting hunt for the Padre's house. They were a long time finding it. Narrow and irregular as were most of the streets, the Padre must have picked out the narrowest. Their mules went in single file, and their small procession excited a great deal of wonder. They arrived with a crowd at the heels of their mules, and the boys set up a shout of delight when the bells ceased and the reins were pulled up in front of the Padre's door.

Perhaps a great deal of the notice they received was due to Sydney's peculiar taste in dress. Those white nankeen suits, the washing of which cost "the Governor" a mint of money, must be spotless, or they offended Sydney's fastidious taste. He had been known to change to as many as three clean suits a day. The slums of Florence were not accustomed to much cleanliness, and Sydney presented, to their eyes, an imposing appearance in his stiff, clean suit, his helmet with its white puggeree, his brilliant button-hole and shiny boots. Much admiration was expressed, audibly, by the women and girls;

the ragamuffins, who had travelled further, and seen more variety, as usual fired off a quantity of what in England would be called *chaff*.

The Padre came to the door at once, and held out both his hands while he showered welcomes upon them. Sydney left the talking to Bors and Dodo, who could speak Italian as well as they spoke English. Their errand was soon explained, and the delighted Padre insisted upon running off at once and fetching Tonio and Terence. They could not have lived far, for he soon came back, panting, red, breathless, and flourishing the great yellow spotted handkerchief, which was Sydney's horror.

Tonio was rather shy, but flushed with eager gratitude, which soon conquered the shyness. He could hardly believe that world of wealth was meant for him, and tears of joy came into those loving brown eyes when he found such was really the case. Bors and Dodo were delighted with him, and could hardly take their eyes off him. They bestowed little notice upon Terence, who hung on to Tonio's arm, and kept his dreamy gaze fixed upon Sydney. The King's daughter was dressed all in white, and could this be the King's son?

But there was no golden crown upon Sydney's head, and the wistful face, after a long scrutiny, buried itself in Tonio's sleeve. Part of the money, Dodo's share, was put into his hand, but after a glance, which showed him it was not "King's gold," he gave it to Tonio without

saying a word. Money was valueless in his eyes, and Tonio, after whispering to him to thank the little lady, was obliged to explain, while his olive cheek flushed, that Terence did not quite understand things. Bors and Dodo were sorry to say "Good-bye" to Tonio. They had taken a wonderful fancy to him. Even Sydney remarked, as they rode leisurely home,

"Jolly-looking chap, that Tonio. Wonderful eyes and fine figure; but I do wish that old Padre wouldn't use those horrid cotton handkerchiefs—ugh!" and Sydney's face of disgust set the two children laughing.

Bors and Dodo heard very little news from England. One brief note to Bella, saying that they were so much obliged to her for taking care of their nephew and niece, and stating that Uncle Jack was very slowly getting better, was all. It was about five weeks after the break-up of the family that Sydney one day brought in the news that the Aunts and Uncle Jack had come to Villa Selvóso, he had been passing that way and seen them arrive, they had sent their love, and would be at the Villa Fornerari as soon after dinner as they could, and if Uncle Jack was rested would bring him with them.

They stayed a month at Villa Selvóso, while Uncle Jack got up his strength, and all this time Bors and Dodo spent with the Deerings and Reids. Bella, who had grown fond of the children, and liked too to have them there for Sydney's sake, for they amused him and kept

him occupied, begged so hard that they might stay that the Aunts had not liked to refuse. They made a merry party, all of them together, and much intercourse was kept up between the two Villas.

The Padre was not forgotten, and after each happy day spent with the English people, walked home on air, and was more and more enchanted. If he had thought of England at all he thought of it as a land of Egypt with thick darkness in the shape of fogs spread over it. Now he clothes it with perpetual sunshine, and nothing can exceed the fervour with which he mentions the English people. "Their tongue is foreign, but their hands are kind, and their hearts are warm."

It is sad to think that we must put an end to the Padre's simple happiness. But Uncle Jack's work wanted him in England, and the Aunts with Bors and Dodo accompany him to make their home with him. Sydney and "the Governor" are getting to England by degrees, and mean to stay a few weeks in Paris on their road. Bella and Willie have gone to Switzerland for a couple of months, and then they will follow the example of the others, unless they are buried alive when upon a "grubbing" expedition, which Sydney mournfully prophesies will be the case.

Tonio and Terence started for Paris, the money the children gave them being carefully saved to pay their journey. They walked as much as Terence's strength would allow them, and many people stopped to bestow

an alms upon the sunny-faced, tattered Italian boy, casting pitying glances upon his companion,—the pale-faced, flaxen-haired child, who clung with one hand to the arm of his handsome friend, and carried in the other a pair of worn-out little boots.

During the journey Terence was carefully tended and cared for by Tonio, and that pair of worn-out boots were kept with equal care by Terence. No dust must be allowed to rest upon them, and if it rained they were anxiously wrapped in a cast-off pocket-handkerchief of the Padre's—this one blue ground with dark crimson spots.

Not for many a weary day was Paris reached by the two patient travellers. As they walked footsore and tired through its streets, Tonio forgot the pain and toil they had gone through in the sight of the sunny fascination and brilliant splendour which make up the charm of that bright and beautiful city. Exclamations of wonder and delight broke from him. He stood still with flushed cheeks, dewy eyes, and red mouth all of a quiver.

Terence heeded it all no more than if he had lived in it every day and hour of his life, but finding, after a while, that Tonio did not stir, he plucked him by the sleeve and said,

"Now we shall find the King's daughter."

Exhausted nature could do no more, and when Tonio turned to answer Terence he reeled against a lamp-post.

He felt sick and faint, and giddy, and remembered what the sight of the beautiful city had driven from his memory, that he had not broken his fast that day. Their last little store of provisions had been given to Terence, and for some distance, when the child was tired he had carried him in his arms.

"What is to be done?" he thought to himself. "It is too late to get flowers, even if I had money to buy them, yet Terence *must* have something to eat, and a room to sleep in—a night in the open air might be the death of him."

The light from the lamp-post fell full upon him, and a gentleman passing by stopped to point him out to his companion. The picturesque figure, the beautiful tired face, made an impression upon both of them. One of them brought out a few sous, changed his mind, and threw him a franc instead, and his companion followed his example. Two francs! what a fortune! The bright smile that lighted up Tonio's face, and his grateful thanks were not lost upon either of the gentlemen.

"What a contrast the brother is," said one of them, as they strolled away.

"See, Terence," said Tonio, joyfully. "Now we shall be able to get some supper, and then a room. We must be quick about it. Poor Terence, I want you to have a good night's rest. I wonder where is the nearest place where we can get something to eat."

Terence hardly heard a word as he followed in

Tonio's steps. His dreamy eyes were seeking every face to see if perchance he might find the "King's daughter."

I brought you to Florence to a little colony of English people gathered in, or around there. Now they have all dispersed, save the Padre and his ragamuffins whom we must, I am afraid, leave behind us. We will bid Florence adieu, and also, with the others, make our way to Paris. We often wish we could tell what friends are doing when they are out of our sight, and now we will indulge ourselves.

Throw wide open the door, stand aside and give plenty of room, make your lowest bow, your most sweeping curtsey, for the patter of dancing feet is heard upon the stairs, and "Miss Dulcie's carriage stops the way."

CHAPTER XIII.

BERNARD TAKES CARE OF DULCIE.

DULCIE'S father, friend, playfellow, and companion had not been himself for several days, tired, headachy, and heavy. Now Dulcie had only had in her short life one illness, but its miseries were well remembered—that illness had been the measles.

"Father Ben," she said to him one afternoon when with trembling fingers, aching eyes, and a feeling of utter weariness he was trying to settle a pearl into its golden shell, "you are going to have the measles, I know you are. And you must go to bed and have the doctor. I'll send Fanchette for him."

"No, no, little woman," answered Father Ben, leaning back tiredly in his chair, "I am not ill, only out of sorts. Not nearly ill enough to have a doctor."

She shook her head reprovingly at him, while her shining, fluffy hair covered her flower-like face.

"Out of sorts means *measles*," she said, positively. "I've *had* them and I *know* what they are like. I had to go to bed and have the doctor. You must go to bed, Father Ben, and have the doctor."

"If I try what a day in bed will do for me, will you let me off having the doctor, Dulcie?"

"We will see when to-morrow comes," she answered, gravely.

"What a quaint little woman it is," said Father Ben, half sadly. "I suppose it is living so much alone with me. I wish you had other children to play with you, Dulcie. That was one reason why I was so sorry to leave Florence just when we did. There you had Bors and Dodo."

"Do you know, Father Ben," she said, reflectively putting her head on one side. "Bors is a teeny, tiny bit like you. Not *nearly so handsome*," she continued, admiringly, with a saucy sparkle in her brilliant eyes.

Ben smiled as she sprang into his arms and nestled there into her favourite position.

"Bors reminds me of *some one*," he said, stroking fondly the silky little head. "Some one I knew years ago, only as you say he is 'not nearly so handsome.'"

"Was he a *friend* of yours?" asked Dulcie.

"It was not a 'he,' but a '*she*,' and a relation as well as a friend," answered Ben.

"Was she nice?"

"*Very*."

"And pretty?"

"*Very* pretty."

"Where is she now?"

"Ah! *That* I don't know."

The voice was so full of pain that Dulcie raised her head from its resting-place and looked at him keenly.

"We'll go to bed early to-night, Father Ben," was the result of her scrutiny, "and you must sleep a nice sleep the whole night long."

"If I can," he said, as he kissed her.

But Father Ben was far from sleeping that night, though Dulcie never knew it. After he got into bed he fell from one fainting fit into another, and it was only towards morning that he sank into a restless slumber.

It was thus Dulcie found him when she danced lightly and on tip-toe into his room. She climbed softly from a chair on to the bed, and sat down beside him. His cheeks were flushed, his lips parched, and his head moved, as if on wires, from side to side. She looked at him, critically, gravely, then smoothed the counterpane with her two hands.

"I don't like him to tumble about so, I wonder why he doesn't lie still," she said to herself, a vague uneasiness making her heart beat faster. "But he is having a nice sleep, and I think I'll go to Church and tell GOD how ill he is, and ask Him to make him quite well."

She kissed him before she went, but the kisses of

her wee red lips were as light as the touch of thistledown upon his cheek, and did not disturb him in the very least.

Then she fetched her hood, tied it on, and was out of the front door in another minute.

But swift and soft as those footfalls were, they fell upon the watchful ear of Bernard. He knew her footstep among a thousand, and why had she not let him out as she always did? for it was his duty to accompany her to church, even if Ben went too, and wait upon the steps until they came out. Dulcie's thoughts this morning were so full of Father Ben, that she had forgotten even Bernard! His deep, angry braying brought Fanchette in haste to the rescue. She was quite as much against Dulcie going out alone as ever Bernard could have been, and she hastened as fast as her aged legs would carry her to unfasten the front door and set him free to follow in his mistress's footsteps.

But the church was only a few yards off, and Dulcie's dancing feet carried her quickly there. The door was just shutting upon her as Bernard bounded up the broad steps. He stretched himself full length upon the topmost one, his tawny muzzle pressed as close against the door as he could get it.

A few boys passed and stayed to look at him. He was so still that he might have been carved in marble. With the temptation to throw stones, which seems to be part of a boy's nature, they took up a few little stones

and flung them at him. Then, seized with terror, ran away and hid.

The stones were small and fell harmlessly upon Bernard's splendid tawny coat. It was raining hard drops of rain perhaps, and the disturbers of his peace, glancing fearfully from their hiding places, saw he did not stir, and returned with wavering footsteps, which gradually grew bolder.

They were joined by bigger boys, and another shower of stones descended upon the head and body of the noble Bernard. In his mind,—and dogs have a mind, a more generous one very often than you find in many men and women,—was the thought that these blows were intended for his dearly loved mistress, and by bearing them himself he was bearing them instead of her. So he lay like a log at the mercy of his tormentors, keeping those silky ears well open for the slightest sound of his mistress's footsteps, the softest echo of his mistress's voice.

The stones became larger; through his thick tawny skin he felt them and winced. Every now and again he raised his dear head and shook it, as a lion might shake himself if he was plagued by gnats, and then the boys ran helter-skelter for a short distance, their hearts in their mouths. All bullies are dreadful cowards, and these nasty creatures were no exception to the rule. When they found that nothing came of the tossings of that big head, they returned to the charge still bolder.

And if Bernard had only opened those huge jaws, and given vent to one of his fierce growls, his tormentors would have scattered in a moment. But his great and generous dog-nature did not understand the turnings and twistings, and littlenesses and teasingnesses of which *some* human minds are made up. He was there to guard his little mistress, to lie still and suffer for her, if necessary to fight for her, if need be to *die* for her.

Several stones, large and with rough jagged edges, cut into the smooth tawny hide, and blood trickled slowly down, staining the steps up and down which the people went and came from Church. Then another stone, bigger, crueller than any of the former ones, aimed directly at his drooping ear, tore the soft skin in a long rent, reaching almost from the top to the bottom. Blood flowed freely from the wound, and the suffering animal gave a low moan, while he pressed his muzzle closer against the door, wondering what fresh pain would come next.

Just at that moment there came along upon the opposite side of the way, a figure who stopped to watch the crowd of boys, and see what they were doing. Other stones were picked up, but never thrown, for the figure dashed into the midst of them, scattering hearty blows right and left, laying about him with a decision and well-directedness of aim which showed that he was not unused to that sort of work. Collaring a couple of the worst, he pounded them until their yells must have been heard half-a-mile away. He took justice into his own

hands, and only stopped because the feet of the bullies were carrying them as far away from him as they could get, and nearly all of them bore a token of him in their faces; some had bruised cheeks, others black eyes, others bleeding noses. They had had a lesson they would not forget; no more worrying animals for some time to come.

The solitary figure left in victorious possession of the field, stretched himself and examined his knuckles,—they were cracked and sore, rather the worse for wear.

"I've shown them what a pair of English fists can do," he sang out aloud in his glee. "That has warmed my bones and done me good. It's a sort of old woman's life I've been leading lately, and I feel a new fellow after *that*. There's nothing like licking cads to a jelly to make them keep their hands off animals. They don't forget that, they *feel* it. I'll always do it when I get a chance. I suppose it runs in the family, for I heard the Governor say that my grandmother once horsewhipped a man who ill-treated a horse. Wish I had hurt those little sneaks more though. Now for the poor beastie. I wonder where his master is."

I need hardly introduce Sydney, who was taking his walks abroad in search of some particular dainty for "the Governor's" breakfast, and happened to pass at so opportune a moment. Bernard wagged his tail, recognizing friend from foe, and allowed him to wipe away the blood from his injured parts, but not much more could Sydney do. The ear ought to be sewn up at once, and

he stepped over the animal's body, took off his helmet, and entered the porch.

The church was dark with beautiful rich stained glass, and Sydney passing into it from the strong morning light, could make out nothing for a few minutes, but stood blinking like an owl. Dulcie had been longer than usual. The first cloud had passed across the sunshine of her life, and she had more to say. Her prayers were the essence of simplicity, she just said straight out the thoughts that were in her heart, without reserve. "Talking to GOD," she called it, and so it was.

"I am so afraid Father Ben is going to have the measles, and I know how ill they make you feel," was part of her prayer to-day. "He is asleep now, but he tumbles about so, he makes me afraid. Please, GOD, keep him still, and don't let him have the measles, and take away all his pain."

From a distant corner came a low chanted murmur, and Sydney was wondering whether he should venture further on and see if he could find the dog's master, when, tripping down the aisle, so lightly she hardly seemed to touch the ground, came a little vision in white, from her cashmere hood to her white kid boots, no touch of colour about her. As Sydney opened the door to let her pass through, she turned to him a lovely wistful face, looked gravely, puzzlingly at him for a moment, then stepped out into the sunshine.

A scream of dismay brought Sydney to her side. Her

arms were round Bernard's neck, her cheek pressed against his head, and those bright eyes, that no tears had ever yet dimmed, were raining down a shower of glittering drops. Sydney hastened to explain that Bernard was not much hurt, but that the ear ought to be sewn up at once.

A weight of care was bowing down Dulcie's sunny head. Father Ben would want her at home, yet poor Bernard ought not to be left to suffer. In her perplexity she looked straight at Sydney, and again the wondering puzzled expression came into her eyes—they wandered to his hands, in one of which he held his helmet, for he had forgotten to put it on when the church door shut behind them.

Her face cleared at once, and the sparkling dancing eyes were those of Dulcie, as she held out both her hands to him and said,

"You are Bors and Dodo's 'big boy.'"

Sydney saw it in a moment. This was Dulcie, and there was Bernard, but where was Father Ben?

"You are Dulcie," he said, smiling down upon her. "But how did you know *me*?"

"They told me all about you," said Dulcie, "and your queer-shaped hat," and she touched his helmet with her forefinger.

He laughed as he put it on. "Then my helmet has done me some service," he said. "But where is Father Ben?"

"Ah," shaking her head gravely. "*Poor* Father Ben. He is tumbling about so."

Sydney did not quite know what to make of this, and was much relieved when she added,

"I am afraid that perhaps he is going to have the measles, but I must go to him. He will be waking up. Oh! poor Bernard, what is to be done with you?"

"I'll look after him," said Sydney, "but I'll take you home first."

"No, no," said Dulcie, reproachfully, "it will be all the worse for him if he waits—you said so."

"Yes; but while we are talking," argued Sydney, "we might be getting to your house. Besides, perhaps it is on the road to a vet's. I must get hold of somebody and ask."

Sydney was surprised to find how quickly those dancing feet could clear the ground,—he had to step out to keep up with them. At the door he paused to say,

"After I've given the Governor his breakfast I'll run round and have a look at Father Ben. I've had a lot to do with illness, and I can tell if he is going to have the measles."

"You are as good as a doctor—almost," said Dulcie, gratefully.

Sydney left Bernard at a veterinary's, promising to call for him in an hour or so, and then hurried off, for it was time the "Governor" had his breakfast. During

that meal he entertained Mr. Reid with a graphic account of his adventures, and Mr. Reid offered to go with him and see Father Ben.

"Father," said Sydney, as they sat at their dinner the same evening, "do you mind my sitting up with Father Ben to-night? You know the doctor said he mustn't be left alone for long together, as he is so weak he might faint away."

"My dear boy," said Mr. Reid, "of course I don't *mind*, except that I am so afraid it will tell upon your strength. Young people want their proper rest more than old ones."

"A night or two sitting up won't hurt me," laughed Sydney, "I am as strong as an elephant. But if it will ease your paternal mind I'll do tumbies, and turn in between the sheets for a couple of hours after breakfast."

"Upon that condition you may go," said Mr. Reid.

"What a brick you are, Father," said Sydney affectionately. "Now if you light your cigar, I will read the leader to you."

"You spoil me, Sydney," said Mr. Reid, as he settled himself in a comfortable arm-chair upon the balcony, while Sydney seated close by him read the leading article in an evening paper, and talked until it was time to go.

Ben had a better night, and was lying in a *still* sleep to Dulcie's satisfaction when she came down in the morning to see him. Sydney insisted upon accompany-

ing her to church, "to wait outside and mount guard over Bernard," and Dulcie, who moaned over the cruelty of the "bad boys," was only too glad that he should do so.

And by degrees Ben got better—Sydney sat up with him about three nights in all. Mr. Reid came often to see him, and took a great interest in the grave reserved man.

When Ben's health had improved Sydney devoted himself to amusing Dulcie, but he could only get her if she was not wanted by Father Ben, and he found the best plan was to take her out when he was hard at work. This pleased both Dulcie and her father, and part of every day saw Sydney and his small companion making themselves acquainted with Paris, not contenting themselves with the best known parts, but driving away and turning up in some queer out-of-the-world corner. Sometimes Mr. Reid went with them if he felt equal to the exertion, sometimes he stayed at home and contented himself with hearing about what they had seen when Sydney came back to dinner. And perhaps this suited him the best of the two, for he often told his son, who only laughed at him for saying it, "that he was getting too old for sight-seeing."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE STORY OF THE PICTURE.

YOU know how much Bors and Dodo had been left to themselves during their stay at the Villa Selvóso, and you will understand what a different life it was to them to find themselves the centre of attraction. Such an unequal balance might have turned the heads of many children, but the brother and sister had strong sensible heads, unusual in children so young in years. Bors was to go to school in six months, and Uncle Jack feared for him. There is such a dead set against a boy whose bringing up has been in any way eccentric, and who is in himself rather out of the common run. Bors was extra outspoken; he had no idea of keeping in the motive which prompted the action. So far Uncle Jack "took the bearings" of his nephew's character correctly. He did not realise that Bors was quite able to hold his own when the time for holding it came.

It was curious how wide awake the Aunts had become. Bors, who was of a speculative nature, pondered over it for minutes together, and upon broaching the subject to Dodo found that she was equally puzzled. It was much pleasanter for them in every way. Their clothes were never now in that awkward stage of nearly falling off their backs, and Bors rejoiced in several pairs of what Sydney would have called "spicy" boots. No need to have them mended nine times now. When these were worn out others would be forthcoming.

They lived in one of the London suburbs, I am not obliged to say which, in a roomy house built just long enough ago for it to be comfortable. Bors and Dodo had a nice little room apiece, but the room in the house which Bors liked best of all was Uncle Jack's study.

The walls were lined with pictures they had brought from the old home. The home where the Aunts and Uncle Jack had lived in the "ages ago," when they were all "young men and maidens," and before Ethel, that was the children's mother, had married. They had been a large family then, nine in all, now three sisters and two brothers had died, and there was a sister married and settled in the West Indies.

It was not entirely for the sake of the pictures, as a whole, that Bors sought Uncle Jack's study so often. It was for the sake of one particular picture which hung over the fireplace. If he was missing every one knew where to find him—stretched upon the tiger-skin, his

elbows resting upon it, his chin nestled in the palms of his hands, his heels describing figures in the air, or sitting upright nursing his right leg, but always gazing at the picture with a perplexed expression upon his face. Somewhere or another he had seen that picture before, or one very like it, and though he was told it was impossible, he persisted that it was so.

The picture was nothing out of the common, only the portrait of a young and handsome man, a man with a broad white forehead, his brown curls growing low upon it, a well-shaped mouth smiling frankly at you, a pair of brown eyes with a yellow light in them. Not much of the figure was painted, but if you could judge from the shoulders, the man who sat for that portrait must have been tall and bonny.

The picture fascinated Bors from the first. He would lie, or sit, by the hour together only to feel the more hopelessly puzzled and provoked at the end. Somewhere he had seen that picture or one very much the same. He went over, reckoning upon his fingers the places to which he had been, all the pictures he had ever known—they were soon told up—and the portrait remained more a mystery than ever.

One afternoon—a dull foggy day in Autumn—Uncle Jack sat writing at his table, and Bors lay upon the tiger-skin gazing with strained eyes and anxious expression at the handsome face of "the man in the picture," as Dodo called the portrait. "Come, come, come," the brown

eyes and frank, half-parted lips seemed to Bors to be always saying. "I'd come if I only knew where," he answered one day, so vivid and so real was his fancy about it.

Uncle Jack wiped his pen and leaned back thoughtfully in his chair.

Three-quarters of an hour the silver chimes in the clock upon the mantle-shelf had chimed since Bors took up that position, and he was just as little inclined to stir as when he settled down into it.

"The child is growing quite thin and anxious-looking," mused Uncle Jack, as he watched the firelight shining upon Bors's earnest square-shaped face, where the bones showed more plainly than they ought. "I must put a stop to this."

"Bors," he said gently.

The boy started and altered his position to the other one he liked, sitting upright nursing his leg, but his face this time turning tablewards.

"Yes, Uncle Jack."

"I am going to tell you something: about that picture. It is the likeness of one of my brothers and your uncle."

"Yes," said Bors, with a weary sigh. He did not care at all about its being the likeness of any one, but he did care very much about remembering where it was he had seen it before. It would settle his mind so if he could only recollect.

"We do not talk of him often. It is a painful subject," continued Uncle Jack, rather quickly. "It happened the last summer we all spent together. I was a lad of fifteen and he was seven years older. He was in a bank in London, and had come to spend part of his holiday with us. One day he was missing, and by the next post we had a letter from the manager of the bank saying that a cheque had been forged to a large amount, and from several combined circumstances, suspicion had fallen upon our brother."

"What is forged?" asked Bors.

"Imitating a person's handwriting so well that you can write their name just as they write it themselves."

"And why do they do so?" questioned Bors still further.

"When people are wicked they get a great deal of money that way sometimes," said Uncle Jack. "You saw me the other day take a cheque and write my name to it, together with the sum of money I wanted to draw from the bank. Now suppose any person could imitate my writing. They could sign a cheque with my name, take it to the bank and get the money they wanted in exchange for it."

"And don't they get found out?" inquired Bors.

"Sooner or later. But sometimes they manage to run away with the money and cannot be caught. This was what it was thought my brother had done, especially when it was heard from some one who had seen him

that he had sailed for Australia in a vessel called 'The Perdita.' Soon after came the dreadful news that 'The Perdita' had caught fire, and every soul on board of her had perished, some in the flames, others had thrown themselves into the water and had been drowned. It was *dreadful.*"

Uncle Jack's voice died away almost to a whisper. Bors sat quite still and did not interrupt. After a while Uncle Jack went on.

"It was a wretched time for all of us. The sad death my brother must have died, and the miserable stain upon his honour and name. But *that* we had not to suffer for long. In the same bank with him was a great friend of his—a fellow without health or moral backbone—whom my brother always pitied. This friend had been led into trouble, and wanted money so badly that he had been persuaded by his bad companions to forge the name to a cheque for the sum he wanted. After it was done he was seized with an agony of remorse, and confessed it to my brother, imploring him to save him from the consequences, saying it would break his mother's heart. The only way in which he could escape was by my brother bearing the blame himself, and this he did, just coming down to us for a day or two, a sort of silent farewell, and then starting for Australia. He pitied the mother of his friend so much, for she was a widow with only that one child, whom she loved devotedly, and I really believe that the shame the exposure must have

brought upon him, would have been the death of her, she loved him so. Then again she had little to live upon, and her son's salary was a great help. All this my brother knew, his nature was such a generous one, and then I suppose he thought that being a large family and our mother having died some few years back, we should be better able to part with him. But if he had known how we grieved over him, and that even now we can hardly bear to mention his name, he would have thought twice before he took the step. But I don't know."

"How was it all found out?" inquired Bors.

"My brother's friend died of consumption, brought on by bad habits in addition to weak health, some few months later, and dying he confessed the past. We had then broken up our home and gone to live in London. None of us had ever believed that our brother, who was honest and open as the day, could have done such a thing. But his running away was so much against him that we were silent upon the subject, except among ourselves, and then we could talk freely. When my brother's friend confessed, it only confirmed what we guessed to be the true state of affairs, but even then we did not clear our brother's memory,—except to the manager of the bank, who was an old friend of my father's,—until after the death of the poor young man's mother. Then we felt we were at liberty to make it known among our friends. The poor manager was

dreadfully cut up about it, but of course it was not his fault. My brother's running away seemed to mark his guilt. Your mother was his favourite sister, Bors. Being a large family, we went a good deal in pairs, and Ethel and he always paired together. When he left in that sudden manner, Ethel found in her bedroom a ring of my mother's he always wore upon his little finger. It was sapphires and diamonds, and in the back of it was a place for hair,—this space he had filled in with a piece of his own brown hair. Ethel wore this ring night and day,—it never left her finger until the day she died, and now Aunt Hessie is keeping it for you. I have told you this story, Bors, to explain to you the reason why that picture seems familiar to you. Ethel was always considered very like her favourite brother. Their eyes were the same, a peculiar amber light in them you rarely see in brown eyes. That likeness was taken when my brother was nearly twenty-two, a few weeks before he—went away from us, and it was his birthday present to my father. When you see that picture, Bors, it is the memory of your mother's face and your mother's eyes that comes back to you."

Bors shook his head.

"I've seen the picture like that one quite lately," he said, "I am sure I have,—it was before we came to England, and it was the same picture, only it wasn't the same."

Bors had been sitting with his back to the portrait

during his Uncle's story, in which he had grown quite interested, now he turned round to look at it again.

How it was the inspiration came to him at that moment I cannot say. Perhaps it was the fresh eyes with which he looked at the picture, or the new thoughts which Uncle Jack's story had put into his mind. Perhaps it was because he was not struggling after it that the remembrance came—as it always does—like a flash of lightning to the puzzled brain. With a shout that made Uncle Jack start, as if a pistol had been fired close to his ear, Bors clapped his hands together, and cried exultingly,

"Father Ben!"

"*Who?*" asked Uncle Jack.

"It's not a picture that I've seen at all, Uncle Jack, it's a *real* person,—it's Dulcie's Father Ben."

"You mean it is *like* him," said Uncle Jack, who had often heard of Dulcie and Father Ben.

"No I don't," said Bors, contradictorily. "Because it isn't *quite* like him. It's different in a great many things, but it's Father Ben himself. Wait, and I'll fetch Dodo," and turning head-over-heels with delight, Bors was off in a second, leaving Uncle Jack a wee bit sore that the boy's thoughts should fly so suddenly from the sad story he had just told him, to his friend Father Ben.

Dodo was dragged in, breathless with the speed at which she had been made to come.

"Now, Dodo," said Bors triumphantly, "who is that picture?"

"That is what you are trying to find out," said Dodo.

"I've found it out. And it's not a picture, but a real live person. But it isn't quite the same. Shut your eyes, and I'll tell you where it is different."

Dodo obeyed.

"The picture," began Bors in the voice of a showman, "is *young*, the real person is old, and his hair isn't all brown, it's some of it *white*. In the picture the hair is in curls, curling over the forehead, and in the real person the hair has come out of curl, and tumbles over his forehead. The picture's eyes are not sad, and the real person's are very sad. And so is his mouth very sad indeed. We always said it was, Dodo. The picture has colour in his cheeks, and the real person has none. The picture has no hair upon his face, and the real person has a lot. Now, Dodo, open your eyes, look at the picture, and tell me who it is."

And Dodo, doing as she was bidden, said quietly,

"Father Ben."

"Better let the subject drop," was Uncle Jack's thought as he met his nephew's look of triumph. "He has made up his mind upon the matter, and it is useless arguing. Time will put it out of his head or convince him that he is wrong."

It is very well for one person concerned in a discussion to say "let it drop:" what if the other one does not

agree to this? Bors, who had grown more puzzled than ever, suddenly called out,

"The picture can't be *two* people. It *must* be Father Ben or Uncle ——. You never told me his name, Uncle Jack."

"His name was Benedict," said Uncle Jack with a gentle sigh, "but we always called him Ben."

"It's queerer and queerer," cried Bors in despair. "The picture can't be *our* Uncle Ben and Dulcie's Father Ben both at the same time. It's no use having a 'think' about it, for it *won't* come right."

"We will let it alone," said Uncle Jack, patting Bors's head, for he saw he was on the verge of tears. "We won't have any more 'thinks' about it."

"But I want to know how Father Ben's likeness came to be here," persisted Bors.

Ah! that Uncle Jack could not tell him. He believed the likeness the child saw was only some fancied resemblance between Father Ben and the portrait. But to draw Bors's attention from the mysterious picture and so by degrees change the subject altogether, he asked him one or two questions about Father Ben and Dulcie, meaning after a time to work round to Sydney, who was ever a fertile theme.

CHAPTER XV.

THE FORGOTTEN NAME UPON THE SIGN-BOARD.

UNCLE Jack leaned back in his chair, his thoughts full of the dead brother whose story he had just told, and hardly heeding Bors as he talked on until a chance word or two attracted his attention. Bors was telling of the last day they had seen Father Ben, of the beautiful locket upon which he was at work, and how he wanted to save up money to buy one just like it for Dodo. Only Father Ben said it cost a very great deal of money.

"It was so odd to see Father Ben putting the diamonds into their little gold houses," said Bors. "It was like tucking somebody up in bed. And they slipped in so quickly. I couldn't do it a bit. And my fingers were a good deal littler than his. His were such big fingers. And he laughed at me for being so clumsy, and he said I wouldn't do for his trade. And Uncle Jack?"

"Yes, Bors."

"He said that when he was a boy no bigger than me, he had set a stone that had fallen out of one of his mother's rings."

A quick exclamation from Uncle Jack. How often he had heard his mother tell that story of Ben when he was a boy, saying, with pride, that for all he had grown so big, the touch of that large firm hand was gentler than any of the girls'. Before Bors could answer the exclamation, Uncle Jack drew him towards him, and said in a low voice,

"What is Father Ben's name? His surname, I mean. You always call him Father Ben."

"That is because we learnt it of Dulcie. She always does. I don't believe I ever heard his other name. Do you want to know *very* much?" looking at his uncle's anxious face with wonder.

"*Very* much indeed."

"Then I'll have a '*hard* think,' and try to remember." And Bors sat down upon the tiger-skin and nursed his right leg, while Uncle Jack waited as patiently as he could. Bors pursued his train of thought out loud.

"We always used to go to Father Ben's upon mules, Carlo with us. We passed the river, and turned down a street where a lot of children lived, they were playing about, and sometimes we stopped to watch them. Then we went by a queer little house with a garden in front, nothing but oyster-shells and broken bottles. We used

to call it the oyster and bottle house, and we wondered if the people who lived in the house ate nothing but oysters, there were so many shells. Then we turned the corner, and down another street, and after that we came into the street where Father Ben's house was. The first thing we did was to see if Father Ben was standing at the door watching for us with Dulcie in his arms. Sometimes he was, and sometimes he was not. Ah!"—and Bors broke off excitedly, while Uncle Jack's face flushed as he bent eagerly towards the boy—"over the door was a board with . . . Father Ben's name . . . upon . . it."

"And it was"—Uncle Jack's voice was quick and sharp. Bors did not answer for a minute. His eyes were gazing as though he saw something a long way off. Then he shook his head sadly.

"I can see the board so plainly," he said, "but I can't read Father Ben's name upon it. Never mind, Uncle Jack," he continued coaxingly; "I remembered the picture, you know, though it was a long time before I did, and I'll have lots of 'thinks' about this until I remember the name."

Uncle Jack was greatly disappointed, but too just and kind to blame the boy's treacherous memory. There was nothing for it but patience, and in the meantime he kept his secret to himself, and reached down from the shelf a stiff book to read, trying not to let what "might be" come between his eyes and the pages. But he could not succeed.

The children dined with their elders until Bors went to school, as they had been accustomed to do at Villa Selvóso. During the meal Bors was silent and pre-occupied. After the meal he shook off Dodo, and returned to the tiger-skin in Uncle Jack's study. It had turned into a wet night. Outside the rain was beating against the panes, the wind was howling round the house, but Bors, stretched in front of a cheerful fire, heard neither the rain nor the wind, saw nothing but an empty sign-board.

He saw that so plainly and distinctly, it shut out every other sight and sound. It was not a plain painted board, but a board made of walnut wood, and enclosed in a roughly carved frame of leaves and flowers. Here and there among the flowers a bee was forcing its way to extract the honey, and here and there upon the leaves a fly perched. Father Ben had told Bors the history of that sign-board—how it was carved for him by a boy whom he had been able to help, and the boy being of a grateful nature, thought of carving the sign-board as a useful way of showing his gratitude. Bors saw the sign-board so plainly to-night, that he could count the bees and flies nestled among the flowers and leaves, could even see that the bit of a leaf had been broken off, and that the stem of one of the flowers was quite gone. The golden letters, of which the name and short inscription had been formed, were faint and faded now, and the name itself, there it was, upon the tip of Bors's tongue, and refusing to slip off. Uncle Jack shut up his book

and dreamed, sometimes hopeful dreams, sometimes desponding ones. That story of the setting the stone in the mother's ring was hopeful, but then it might be just possible that two boys might have the same talent, and exercise it in the same way. Then again, was it not more likely that Bors would have noticed the two names being the same; if Father Ben was really Benedict Cramer, would he not have thought to himself that it was the same name as his Aunts', and would not have forgotten it now? Uncle Jack did not realise how seldom, if ever, when at the villa, the children heard their Aunts' or Uncle's surname. Carlina never made use of the English form, "Miss Cramer." It was always "Yes, Signora," "No, Signora," and so on, as the case might be. And how little the children had heeded Father Ben's surname was easy to see by the difficulty Bors had in recalling it.

While Uncle Jack tormented himself with alternate hopes and doubts, the wood crackled in the fire, and fell down bit by bit, a heap of white ashes upon the hearth. Neither of the two heeded it; they did not know that time was going at all, until Dodo knocked at the door to say that tea was ready.

Poor Bors had sign-board upon the brain. He could not get it out of his head, and when he went to bed he found Sleep had given herself a holiday, and had flown away from him. Before his wide open eyes floated the blank sign-board, and if he shut them it was just the

same, there was the sign-board floating in mid air. He tossed restlessly from side to side, buried his head beneath the bed-clothes—there was the sign-board still, the sign-board perfect in every detail, even to the missing portions of it, except the one important thing, the name that was written upon it.

Sometimes he fell into a doze for a few minutes, only to dream that the sign-board hung round his neck a dead weight, and was dragging him down some dreadful precipice, at the bottom of which he must fall, a mere heap of broken bones—and awoke to find himself safe and snug in his own little bed, but before his eyes still, the sign-board, carved in leaves and flowers, with that provoking blank in the midst of it filled in with faint gold, but to him invisible, letters.

If any of the household had been equally restless that night they must have had a great fright given them, for between twelve and one a little white-robed figure flew madly down stairs, with hair on end, glowing eyes—the amber shining in them as though they were on fire—and scarlet cheeks. It flew along the corridor, straight to Uncle Jack's room which it entered at a rush, without a warning knock or sound and shouted, "Benedict Cramer, Working Jeweller."

The rain had cleared off, and Uncle Jack was standing at the open window, his head and half his body out of it. He was looking at a watery moon which, after a tussle with some angry clouds, had managed to struggle

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into a clear sky, but the clouds were chasing her and trying to send her indoors again. The sound of a voice, though he did not hear what was said, caught Uncle Jack's ear, and he turned from watching the moon to find his little nephew, at nearly one o'clock in the morning, capering madly about in his night-shirt, his bare toes performing a quick double-shuffle which very soon ran him out of breath.

"Bors, are you crazy? Do you know what time it is? And Aunt Fluff sleeps underneath. What *is* the matter?"

"You are not undressed. Oh, for shame, Uncle Jack. Do you know what time it is?"

Uncle Jack laughed.

"Didn't you hear what I said when your head was out of the window?"

"No!"

"I saw it all in a minute so plainly, though the letters *are* wearing out dreadfully. Father Ben must paint them up again."

"What was the name?" Uncle Jack turned white, then red, then white, and all in one minute.

"That was what I told you when your head was out of the window." I think Bors had rather lost *his* head when he found the name, for he was dancing about like a mad thing again. Perhaps it was because it was such a relief to get it off his mind.

"Bors, tell me at once," and Bors, who had not looked at his Uncle's face before, replied promptly,

"Benedict Cramer, Working Jeweller."

He was not prepared for the rush Uncle Jack made at him—what about Aunt Fluff's room, which was underneath?—nor the half sobbing,

"GOD bless you, Bors."

"What is the matter?" he asked in surprise.

"Father Ben is your *Uncle* Ben, and Dulcie is your cousin. Don't you see it, Bors? Our name, your Aunts', and mine, is *Cramer*, and so was your mother's before she was married. Benedict Cramer! I was telling you his story only this afternoon, and oh, Bors, to think that he has turned out *your Father Ben.* After all you were right about the picture." And Bors had another hug.

"I don't understand," said poor Bors, his gleefulness vanishing. It seemed as if he was destined to always have something upon his mind. "How can Father Ben be my Uncle Ben, if my Uncle Ben was drowned, or burnt alive, or something?"

"He couldn't have been drowned of course," said Uncle Jack, laughing, "but that he will have to explain himself. And now, Bors, tumble into my bed and go to sleep *at once.* I'll stretch myself upon the sofa and sleep there."

"It is quite time you were in bed," said Bors wisely. "Will you promise to undress *at once*, Uncle Jack?"

"The very minute you are asleep. I shall sit by you until you are." And Bors curled himself round like a

dormouse, trying hard to put everything away from him, as Uncle Jack advised—signboard, Father Ben, Benedict Cramer, Dulcie, Dodo's astonishment, the Aunts' astonishment, how they would find Father Ben, how it happened, how it was it couldn't have happened because Uncle Ben was dead, drowned, or burnt in the sad burning of the "Perdita,"—all these perplexities Bors put resolutely away from him, though they crept back now and then, and it was some time before he could get any peace. The paper of the room was pale green with tiny silver stars shining over it. Bors turned his head to the wall, and kept his eyes fixed upon one of these stars. It twinkled and sparkled for some time, then grew larger, and brighter, and clearer, then it ceased to be a star, but became a large ball of living, silver light, then the ball melted away and the air became silver, and——the—eyelashes swept over those excited eyes,—the——lips——unclosed,—and Bors was in the land of dreams.

You may imagine the wonder and delight of the household the next day. From "morn until dewy eve" the great bustle reigned supreme, plans were made and unmade twenty times. It was no use writing to Florence for Father Ben's present address, for Bors and Dodo, who seemed quite at home with his domestic arrangements, said that Dulcie carried all her pets with her, and the house was just shut up, Father Ben taking the key with him. "And left no address to which his

letters should be sent?" asked poor Uncle Jack in despair.

"Father Ben was never bothered with any letters," explained Bors, with a superior air, as though it was a great advantage for a person to have no letters, "except business letters, and those, he said, always kept until he came back."

"It's looking for a needle in a bundle of hay to go to Paris and hunt up a man who is only *staying* and not *living* there," said Uncle Jack resignedly. "But it's the only thing we can do."

And as every one objected to being "left at home," they all had their own way and went. Uncle Jack head and chief, after him I think Bors, then the Aunts and Dodo,—all on a hunt for Father Ben.

CHAPTER XVI.

"I AM COME TO BE YOUR PAGE."

SYDNEY had taken Dulcie with him to help him to choose a present for Bella, whose birthday was coming on.

"I don't suppose she'll *look* at it," he said, pathetically; "she'll be thinking of *Willie's* so much, but I've always given her a birthday present ever since she was the Governor's ward, and I don't mean to leave it off now."

The present was to be bought at a glass and china shop, and Sydney thinking that Bernard's feathery tail would be very much in the way in an establishment of this kind, had taken the precaution before they went out of chaining the beautiful animal with an iron chain, one end of which was fastened into a ring in the wall of the miniature back yard where Fanchette's "washings" took place.

Bernard was wagging the said tail in a state of dreadful indignation. If his little mistress's had been the hand that tethered him, a gossamer thread would have held him like a rock, and he would not have attempted to stir until she came back. But Bernard did not recognise that Sydney had any right to tie him up, and I am sorry to write it of a S. Bernard dog, but the fact remains, he was in a *shocking* rage. Sydney was all very well in his proper place, but he was not Bernard's master. Was the iron chain that bound him a *very* strong one? It was not yet too late to scent them out. Bernard raised his big body and stretched himself, walked the length of the chain, lashing his feathery tail and uttering a low muttered growl, then brought the whole weight of his body to bear upon the chain. It *was* a very strong one. Bernard sat down.

With tawny head erect, and heart and will thrown into the struggle, he tried a second time. His back was strong, but iron chains are not to be tampered with. He lay down, put out his tongue, and panted.

The struggle was renewed and the chain protested. Creak, creak, creak it went. Bernard liked the noise, and it put fresh life into him. It must be trying work, bringing all your opposition to bear against a foe, who is not only strong but *silent*. The creaking of the chain invigorated Bernard.

Nothing *but* creaking however came of these efforts, and Bernard lay down tired and panting. But he had

the spirit of the conqueror within him, and he renewed the contest undaunted by former failures.

The chain would have borne any amount of tugging, not so the plaister of the wall, it loosened and gave way after each pull, and when Bernard for about the seventh time returned to the charge, a desperate wrench upon his part pulled out the iron ring and left him a free dog.

Fanchette had been cleaning, and the doors were wide open. One bound cleared the kitchen, another gained the street, and then burrowing his nose to find the proper scent, Bernard was down the street upon their trail. He looked a formidable creature, panting hard, with distended nostrils, and dragging that heavy chain after him. Little wonder that people were scared and left him the exclusive use of the pavement. All the better for Bernard. He rattled along at a fine pace, never stopping until he found his mistress.

Sydney and Dulcie were standing with their backs to the door, hesitating between a cunningly-shaped goblet of blue Bohemian glass and something equally pretty, when they were startled by a dull thud upon the floor, a clattering clinking, a dismayed cry from the shopkeeper, and a tremendous crashing of glass and china.

In at the door had bounded the delighted Bernard, his splendid head held high, his loving eyes soliciting welcome, his feathery tail going like a windmill.

Crash, crash, crash, crash, crash went glass and china

from either side, the ground strewed with their broken beauties, while Bernard's destructive feet never stayed until his cold nose found refuge in Dulcie's little hand.

She had the presence of mind to catch hold of his tail, or much more damage might have been done. He stood meek as a lamb while she scolded him, and at the end of her lecture Dulcie turned to Sydney, with a little sigh, and said,

"I am afraid that as he has been so naughty, perhaps he ought to have a teeny, tiny beating."

"And as he isn't my dog, I'd rather not be the one to give it," said Sydney, hastily, for Bernard's eyes had a look in them which made him feel he was not the dog's owner, and that the dog knew it. "I don't want to be bitten."

"He *never* bites," remarked Dulcie somewhat indignant, but privately relieved to find her pet would be let off his beating.

Sydney shrugged his shoulders, and briefly said, "I'd rather not try. But oh—" with a whistle of dismay, "look at the mischief he has done!"

At which Dulcie renewed her scoldings, until Bernard's head hung down, and his silky ears quite hid his face. He knew he was in disgrace. By Sydney's advice his mistress led him gently out of the shop by his tail, of which she was afraid to let go, and in order to do this they had both to walk out backwards.

Once outside, Dulcie let him sit down upon the

lowest step, while she impressed upon him the naughtiness of his conduct.

Sauntering along the broad pavement came a thin, fair child. He was looking earnestly from side to side as if in search of some one, and seemed to find a dreamy enjoyment in the scene as he turned his head first one way, then another, now stopping still to quietly scan the carriages as they drove along the road. Tonio and Terence lived in a street not many yards off, and as Tonio was now away all day, Terence was allowed to walk once up and down this wide street during Tonio's absence. There were so many well-dressed people, and always a policeman or two about during the hours to which his walk was restricted, so Tonio knew there was no cause for fear. The street was not more than half a mile long, but walking at the pace Terence walked, and stopping as he stopped, it lasted him some three or four hours. It pleased the child to be allowed to take this walk, and it interested him equally. He could indulge his fancy of searching for the King's daughter. Those searching blue eyes of his were getting well known, many gave him a smile, a kind word, a coin,—no one ever thought of harming him.

A carriage filled with gay ladies passed rapidly by, near to the pavement; they were on their road to some garden fête, and their dresses were bright and pretty. Terence's large eyes rested upon each of them in turn,—no King's daughter of fairy form was in that carriage,

if perchance she was hidden between those flowing skirts, his quiet searching eye would have found her out. He walked on a few steps, a pin glittered in a crevice, and attracted him by its glitter. He stooped to pick it up, raised his head, and there upon a door-step, and as though she had fallen from the skies, the King's daughter was before him.

He knew her again, and would have known her anywhere, though the golden crown was hidden by the close fitting white cashmere hood, and only a few stray pale and silky curls curled over the white brow, showing how fine in texture and pure in colour was the gold whereof the crown was made. It was not in the nature of Terence to feel surprised. He just stepped up to where she was, stood in front of her, doffed his ragged cap, and said quite quietly and simply,

"I am come to be your page."

The scoldings with which his arrival, he did not in the least know why, had been received, had much depressed Bernard, and feeling that this might be a still greater offender than himself, he set up a low, but significant growl. A word from Dulcie silenced him, but he kept one eye steadily fixed upon the intruder, and was ready to send him to the right-about, if Dulcie gave him a chance.

"What do you want?" asked Dulcie, answering him in Italian, the language in which he had spoken.

"I am come to be your page," he repeated, while his

blue eyes fixed themselves upon her face in dreamy admiration. Surely the King's daughter was more beautiful than he had ever thought.

Dulcie was puzzled, but she did not laugh at him. She answered him just as simply,

"I do not want a page. I've got Father Ben and Bernard, and I don't want anybody else."

"But I have come to be your page," persisted Terence. "We have followed you all the way from Florence to Paris, and I have walked up and down this street every day that it was fine, looking for you. And now I have found you."

Dulcie felt more and more bewildered. If Father Ben could see him Father Ben would understand. But she could not. She stroked Bernard's head as if to gather wisdom from the brains there must be inside it. This action, which showed he was taken back into favour again, set the windmill in motion. But one eye was still kept upon the unwelcome intruder.

"Have you got a father?" she asked, at length.

"Father left me," said Terence.

"Poor boy! And have you a mother?"

"No."

"Then who takes care of you?"

"Tonio."

Sydney came out just then, and she explained the matter to him.

"Little humbug," grumbled Sydney, but he changed

his mind when he saw the thin figure, fragile features, and dreamy eyes. "Not all there, a button missing," was his next thought.

"I've spent all my money," he said to Dulcie, "and thanks to this beastie, I am a young man at large with pockets to let," and he gave Bernard's tawny side a poke with his stick. A respectful poke, not a vicious one, and Bernard recognised the difference, and wagged his feathery tail at a fine rate. He certainly had cost Sydney a "pretty penny" by his disobedience, though of course dogs have a nature above money, and its advantages and disadvantages, and he could not be expected to understand the mischief he had done.

Dulcie understood, quite as little as Bernard, the latter half of Sydney's sentence. He had a habit of sometimes talking over her head, but she liked him all the better for it. Now, she glanced wistfully at him, as she said,

"I've got some money at home, and he is so thin and ill-looking. I should like Father Ben to see him. Father Ben is fond of boys, and always helps them. Will you write down upon a piece of paper Father Ben's name, and where we live, and then he can come and see us this evening."

Sydney took an envelope from his pocket and obeyed. Then Dulcie gave the envelope to Terence, and told him to come to the address that was written in pencil this evening at seven o'clock. Then with a nod and smile she took Sydney's hand, and they walked off toge-

ther, Bernard following, not however before he had sniffed the intruder's legs in a fashion which plainly said, "I shall know you again."

Terence hastened after them, trying to keep them in sight. For some time he succeeded, though he had to trot very fast, for Dulcie's dancing feet got over the ground quickly. They had turned down several streets, and in one of the turnings—for Terence's steps lagged painfully—he lost them. Sydney had hailed a carriage, and they had bowled out of sight before Terence had seen them. He was very tired, and sat down upon a door-step to rest, grasping tightly in his hand the envelope Dulcie had given him. He did not quite take in about it, but he felt it was a talisman to restore him to her, and then Tonio would understand what it meant. He was happy and content, and upon the step he sat and rested, dreaming of the King's daughter.

Directly after the two boys appeared in Paris, Tonio fell upon his feet. The grace and beauty of his bouquets attracted the attention of a florist who owned large gardens and many conservatories and hot-houses. This florist asked an Italian friend to act as interpreter, and offered what Tonio considered a princely salary if he would give up selling flowers upon his own account, and devote his time to making up bouquets for him. There was one condition attached: in order to test his honesty and steadiness Tonio was to work for a month without any wages, the florist providing him with food and a

decent suit of clothes. And Tonio was nearly throwing up the whole affair, because of Terence. What would become of Terence during that time? The florist heard of the difficulty, and suggested that Tonio, during his trial month, could have a certain number of flowers every day, these he could make into button-holes, and sell in after hours. Tonio was gratitude itself. The plan was tried and found to answer, he made quite enough by these button-holes to keep Terence in comfort, and as for himself, only Tonio never thought of himself, he had more than he wanted.

The month flew as if it had wings. A week ago it had expired, and to-day Tonio was to receive from his master his first week's salary, not whole and entire this time, for his master had had to deduct Tonio's keep for the week, and some that he had advanced him for Terence. But he was not a niggardly man, and Tonio served him, as he did everything he had to do, with his heart as well as with his hands, so the master had added a small present. And, from to-day, there would be no more short commons for Terence; more than that, he should have whole new suits of clothes, as often as there was money wherewith to buy them. How should his darling be dressed? Tonio sent a rapid glance into many a shop-window as his feet speeded through street after street until they brought him to the house where they lived.

They had passed from one extreme to another. In

Florence their room had been upon the lowest floor of a small house, now they were in an attic of attics in one of the highest houses in Paris. It was cheap, it was out-of-the-way. If any one was bent upon mischief they would pause half-way up the stairs, there were so many of them, and not follow Terence to the top. Then upon every flight, and I should be afraid to say the number of flights, lived people, and there is safety in numbers, as we all know. So with these precautions Tonio was not afraid to leave Terence all the day while he must be at work.

Treading as though the whole world belonged to him, Tonio came home this evening, springing up the countless stairs as if he was on level ground, not bending his back, but holding it and his head erect, and whistling gaily as landing after landing was reached and passed. In his hand he held the shining money, it should be the first thing Terence's dreamy gaze should rest upon as he entered their little room, and he would say—

But the door is reached and flung open, and Tonio with his curly head flung back, his brown eyes flashing gleefully, treads one step over the threshold, then draws back, while the outstretched hand falls to his side, the money is scattered upon the floor, the gladness dies out of his sunny face, and wild terror takes possession of that loving heart.

The nest is empty, the bird has flown. With all his care, something dreadful must have happened to Terence,

or he would have been home hours ago. The silence of the room makes him shiver as if an iceberg were floating near to him. He shuts the door as hastily as he had opened it, and runs down the stairs with one sole thought, as he sets forth upon his hopeless search; Paris, how large it is; Terence, how innocent and how confiding.

CHAPTER XVII.

"AND THEN I WENT UP ANOTHER FLIGHT OF STAIRS."

AS Terence sat upon the doorstep, his eyes closed, his head nodded, and he went fast asleep. He was aroused by the click of the door at his back. In a fright he jumped up and ran down the street, his heart thumping against his side. His thoughts turned homewards to Tonio and to supper. If he could find the long wide street he should know his way back. Which was the road the King's daughter led him? The streets were so much alike about there. He turned into one after another, and thought he was retracing his steps, when he was in reality going further and further away. And a couple of hours later found him wandering still.

Those slender limbs could bear him no longer. He sank in a heap upon the pavement, a dark mist before his eyes, a singing in his ears, his fingers clasped tightly over the precious paper, his head falling upon the hard

stones. He was roused to sight and sound by loud voices talking and laughing. Steps were passing close by him, they were going in to the actors' entrance of a third-rate little theatre, when one of the men chanced to glance at the motionless heap upon the pavement.

"Hoop la, what is this?" he said, and stooping raised Terence, who staggered for a minute, then stood upright upon his feet.

"A child," said one of the others who was in a bad temper. "You can see that for yourself."

"Now I can, *then* I couldn't," answered the first good-naturedly. "*Whose* child I wonder?"

"Hand him over to the police," said a third.

"There is not a policeman near," said the first, who still had hold of Terence.

"Then leave him where you found him—you will be late for your part, François. Come along."

"He would do splendidly for the 'lost child' that old Pepinese has been trying so hard to get," said François. "He's forlorn, and desolate, and pathetic enough for any one—I've a great mind to take him off at once to the manager."

The others began to be interested. They spoke to Terence, but he only shook his head. He did not understand French. They did not know this, and deemed him shy.

They took a critical survey of him as he stood before them in his rags and tatters, his long fair hair falling

over his white, childish face, his large, light blue eyes more dreamy than usual from the utter tiredness, hunger, and weariness that overpowered him. He was pathetic and forlorn enough they were all agreed, and Terence would have been taken off at once to the manager and his fate sealed if one of the men had not suddenly called out,

"He has a piece of paper in his hand,—take it from him, François, and see what it is."

François lifted the thin wrist and, not unkindly or roughly, tried to unclose those small fingers that held the paper. But the instant that precious scrap of paper was touched a lion was roused in Terence. With a wild shriek and half-strangled sob he tried to wrench himself away from the hand that held him. But François' grasp was firm now, and the curiosity of all was awakened to know what that paper could contain which was held by its owner as if it had been a relic. Struggling as you would have thought it impossible that slender tired figure *could* struggle, beating the air with his hands, gasping for breath, his blue eyes distended, and a terrified expression in them like you see in an animal brought to bay, Terence tried to break away from his captors. François took no notice of the struggles, only held him by the shoulder in a strong grip. An English gentleman and boy who were passing turned to watch the scuffle, and Uncle Jack, for it was he and Bors, seeing that it was not fair play, came forward.

François would have held his ground, but the others scuttled up the steps and in at the door in a second. Just then a bell pealed inside the place, and François after a slight hesitation loosed his hold of Terence's shoulder, and followed sulkily in the wake of his companions.

For the second time that evening Terence's strength failed him, and he fell to the ground.

Uncle Jack hailed a passing carriage, and lifted the child into it.

"Are we going to take him to the hotel?" asked Bors.

"We must for the present," said Uncle Jack. "They will tell us perhaps of some hospital where they will take care of him. Poor child, how ill he looks. He seems more dead than alive."

Bors did not recognise Terence. He and Dodo had taken so little notice of him, their attention had been all given to Tonio. Uncle Jack rubbed one thin hand, and then tried to open the other.

"He has hold of an envelope so tight," he said, "that I can hardly unclasp his fingers. Perhaps the address upon it will tell us where his friends live. He doesn't look as if he had any. He is so ragged and thin. Nothing but skin and bone. Here is the envelope at last. Smooth it out, Bors. How crumpled it is."

Bors placed it upon his knee and smoothed it carefully with his coat sleeve. Sydney had written Father

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Ben's name and address inside an old envelope of Bella's to him. It was the *outside* Bors had uppermost, and as his eye lighted upon the well-known name, he shouted out, "Uncle Jack, *look*," and held it up. Uncle Jack nodded.

"Then Sydney must know something about the child," he said. "Tell the driver to drive to that address. Give him the envelope that there may be no mistake."

Mr. Reid and Sydney were "not at home," but were expected in every moment. Every moment, however, was of consequence to Terence, and Uncle Jack carried out his first intention, drove to his hotel, found out a place where Terence could be received at once, drove there, and did not leave until the child was safe in bed, conscious, but weak and ill, and moaning for "Tonio."

Bors had refused to leave Uncle Jack, and when Terence spoke a few words in Italian he answered them in the same tongue. The tired eyes brightened languidly at the sound of the familiar speech. Terence had forgotten everything but Tonio,—the King's daughter, the teasing men did not disturb his rest, the burden of his song was "Tonio, Tonio."

"Ask him where Tonio lives, Bors," said Uncle Jack, "and we will go and tell him he is safe."

"Where does Tonio live?" asked Bors, his lips close to Terence's ear.

At first Terence put his hand to his head and looked hopelessly bewildered. But Tonio, fearing always lest

his child should stray away and lose himself, had made him repeat over and over again the name of the street, the number of the house where they lived. It was only for a minute the well-known sound had ceased to make itself heard. His hand fell upon the coverlet again, and he said more brightly but with the air of one repeating a lesson,

"133, Rue de S. Michel."

"Tell him we will come and see him to-morrow, and Tonio too. And tell him to shut his eyes and go to sleep," said Uncle Jack.

Bors did so, and Terence shut his eyes obediently. Tonio would come. His mind was at rest, and he soon slept, the sleep of utter exhaustion.

Uncle Jack and Bors, who had been up and doing early that morning, and upon the search after Father Ben all the time, except when they had come upon Terence, were beginning to feel they had done a hard day's work. But they hailed another carriage and drove to where they had been directed by Terence.

"They are big houses," said Bors, looking timidly at the great buildings looming darkly against the clear, bright, starlit sky. It was difficult to see the number, and the driver had made half a dozen bad guesses before he stopped at the right one.

"Don't you think we have made a *mistake*?" suggested Bors as they descended. "He looks too poor to live in such a big house."

"A small room at the top of the house most likely," said Uncle Jack, laughing, and this proved to be the case, for upon the driver saying "Tonio," the porter answered, "The top story, third door to the right."

They made their way up stairs; they seemed never to come to an end. Each flight which they thought must be the last showed yet another flight, and another beyond that, and so on.

Bors kept up manfully, for he wanted to see the last of the affair, but his legs ached dreadfully. Like the Village Blacksmith, his day had been "well spent," and his body was as well. Uncle Jack, seeing his footsteps dragged, suggested a half-way rest for a minute or two. Bors sat himself gratefully down upon the cold stone stair, and rubbed, first one aching leg, and then another.

"I hope we shall find Mr. Tonio at home," spoke the voice of Uncle Jack gloomily from the darkness. He was standing behind Bors, leaning his back against the dusty, dirty wall, regardless in his tiredness of his stainless broadcloth.

"Tonio," mused Bors, "I know that name. Oh yes, it was the name of that boy. Oh, Uncle Jack, suppose it *should* be Tonio!"

"I suppose it *will* be Tonio," said Uncle Jack; "as it is Tonio we are going to see."

"Yes, but our Tonio—Dodo's and mine."

"I did not know that you *had* a Tonio."

"Yes," said Bors, nodding. "He was one of the

Padre's boys. He was such a beautiful boy. Even Sydney said so. Oh, Uncle Jack, shall we have time to go and see Sydney to-night?"

"I am quite sure we shall not," said Uncle Jack, knocking, by his decided tone, any hope Bors might have formed, on the head at once. "*I* am famishing, if you are not. Sydney must wait until to-morrow. Are you rested?"

"Now I can climb any number of stairs," said Bors, springing gaily up. "Lead on to victory, Uncle Jack."

Nearly as many more stairs as they had already climbed.

"I should think twice about going out if I were Tonio, and lived up here," said Uncle Jack, grimly. "No wonder that poor child is reduced to skin and bone. Third door on your right. Here you are. Oh, my knuckles! Take care of your head, Bors."

No answer to the knocking. They opened the door and walked in. Silence upon every side. No sound of breathing even. It was evident that after all their trouble Tonio was "not at home."

At that very moment, however, he was coming up. If they had rested a little longer, or he been a little earlier, he would have trodden upon their heels. Three or four steps at a time those shapely limbs took, the owner joyful with a last hope that he might find Terence had come in during his absence. Bright and radiant with this hope, he flung the door widely open, and upon his listening ear, strained to catch the lightest sound, fell a deep-

drawn breath. He sprang forward, stretching out his arms to the darkness.

"Terence, Terence," his delighted voice called. "Then you are at home, after all. I have been hunting for you everywhere. Terence, *why* don't you speak?"

"Speak to him as quickly as you can," whispered Uncle Jack to Bors. "Tell him at once that Terence is safe."

Bors did so, and made him understand in as few words as he could where Terence was, what happened, and how they had found him.

Tonio's excitable Italian nature had been highly strung, and he burst into tears, tears of relief now he knew that Terence was really safe. Tall fellow though he was, he was not ashamed of tears, as an English boy would have been, but wiped them away with his ragged sleeve, while he broke into expressions of the boundless gratitude he owed to the two kind gentlemen.

He struck a light, and Uncle Jack was able to have a look at him. Yes, there was wonderful beauty in that face he could not but own, though he saw it not as Bors and Dodo saw it, merry and bright as a sunshiny summer, but tear-stained, excited, worn, yet still lighted up by the sweet smile upon those red lips of a true unselfish love.

Uncle Jack took as great a fancy to him as his nephew had done.

Bors explained to his Uncle that Tonio wanted to start off at once to see Terence.

"Tell him," said Uncle Jack, "that he is very tired and hungry, and will make himself ill if he does not eat, and if he is ill he will be of no use to Terence."

Tonio obediently tried to eat, swallowed a few mouthfuls of bread, but the food upon the table was uncooked, and the fire in the stove had long since died away. Uncle Jack took out his watch, looked at the time, and shrugged his shoulder.

"It is lucky the Aunts know what we are about," he said, "or they would be anxious. As their minds are at rest, there is nothing for it but to go through with this business. We must take Tonio to the nearest restaurant, Bors,—I told the driver to wait,—and give him an eatable supper,—he can't swallow uncooked food. Tell him to lead the way down stairs. You can explain on our road down, it's long enough for anything."

In front of No. 133, Rue de S. Michel, waited the polite and patient driver. He had been uneasy, it must be confessed, not upon his own account, but because he did not often drive a little boy and English gentleman at this hour of night, and see them vanish for an indefinite space, directed into the upper regions of a very high house in—well, not in the *West end* quarter of Paris, and he had misgivings. He was delighted to see them return in safety, though he glanced suspiciously at Tonio.

The drive through the gaily lighted streets of Paris to the bright and sparkling restaurant was beautiful for Bors, and he sat in a trance of delight. Then to see the zest

with which Tonio ate such a supper as never before in his life he had tasted, made the others feel so hungry, that when Uncle Jack suggested that, "just to save time, they had better have supper there too, and trust to the Aunts not waiting," Bors clapped his hands and sang out a loud English "Hurrah" that made people sitting at the tables look round and laugh, and Uncle Jack say resignedly,

"It is a good thing we don't go people-hunting every night of our lives. Mind what you are about, Bors, they will take you up for a conspirator, and you may perhaps sleep inside the four dark walls of a prison."

After their appetites were satisfied, Bors, prompted by Uncle Jack, explained to Tonio that he would not be allowed admittance to the hospital until the next day.

"He says he shall sleep close by the hospital, and wait until to-morrow morning," translated Bors.

"Tell him he had much better go home," said Uncle Jack. "It is a mad thing to do,—sleep in the streets, if you have a roof above your head, even though that roof is nearer to the sky than you and I found convenient, Bors."

Tonio shook his brown curls, gently but firmly, and by graceful gestures gave Uncle Jack to understand that near to the walls that enclosed his Terence his night would be spent.

"It is a madness, which as a respectable English citizen I feel bound not to encourage," said Uncle Jack.

"But as Tonio means to do it, we may as well drop him at the hospital, which we pass on our way back."

They left him standing, ragged cap in hand, his small head held erect, the night wind lifting the curls from his forehead, and his radiant face turned to watch the carriage as it bowled away.

For a full half hour Tonio wandered round the building, wondering which of the lighted or unlighted rooms held his Terence: then chose a dark corner, and curled himself round like a dog, and was soon asleep, so sound asleep that the curls which the wind loved to lift and play with, and the flutter of a rag here and there, was the only sound the brown ball gave the whole night through of being a living, breathing person.

So still, that the policemen passing upon their beat with firm even tread, passed by his corner and did not notice him, or thought that he was a shadow from a shrub which stood close by.

The heap lay thus until the morning sun awoke it into life, and Tonio stretched first one limb and then another, opened his eyes, and seeing the unusual sight of the blue sky for his bed-canopy, thought he was back in Florence, and expected to hear the gentle rushing of the Arno, near which had been his favourite resting place. Then sprang to his feet, and waited all impatiently the hour, when the doors of that great building would open, and he should be free to rush in and hold in his arms again, his child friend,—his Terence.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE MESSAGE OF THE RING.

BORS'S proposal the next morning that they should look up Sydney was received with favour by Uncle Jack. He thought that perhaps Mr. Reid could suggest some fresh plan for finding Father Ben. They had been hunting for nearly a week without any success. Uncle Jack did not want to set the police to work until a last resource.

Mr. Reid and Sydney were just beginning breakfast when Uncle Jack and Bors were shown in. They were equally astonished and delighted to see their visitors, and Uncle Jack and Bors took some fruit upon their plates to keep them company while they ate their breakfast.

Preoccupied as he was with his own affairs, Uncle Jack could not help an amused smile playing round his mouth, as he saw how as the breakfast proceeded every-

thing eatable, ranged itself by degrees around "the Governor's" place. Sydney was so anxious he should not want for anything, and the rest of the tablecloth was a "howling wilderness," while in front of Mr. Reid and treading upon each other's heels, were fish, game, hot-roll, toast, fruit, mustard, pepper, salt, sauces, sugar, cream, &c., &c., &c. His plate too was never empty, for Sydney anticipated his wants before he knew them himself.

"By the bye, Bors," said Sydney, after he had satisfied himself that "the Governor's" tea was just to his taste, "since we have been in Paris I have made friends with some friends of yours. Guess who they are?"

Uncle Jack and Bors started, and both said as with one voice,

"Father Ben and Dulcie."

"Right you are," said Sydney, peeling a pear in a leisurely manner, and not noticing the agitation of one of his guests; "and they are out and *outers*, and no mistake."

Uncle Jack poured himself a glass of water, which he drained, and then explained, as briefly as possible, the state of the case. He did not enter into details then: only said that Father Ben was a brother whom they had long ago had reason to suppose dead, and the reason of their sudden appearance in Paris was to find him. To say that Mr. Reid and Sydney were astonished would be saying little.

"Surprises never come singly," was Sydney's first coherent remark. "Isn't it the rummest thing, Father, you ever heard in your life? Isn't it odd how things turn out? Why Dulcie is your *first cousin*, old man."

Bors nodded.

"Where were they to be found?" was the next question.

The address was quickly produced, and then Sydney went on to say that it had been arranged that Dulcie was to spend that day with them.

Father Ben's illness had put him very much behindhand with his work, and he had promised when he undertook the setting of the jewels that a portion of them should be in the countess's hands by a certain day, as she had to wear them at some grand ball. He was determined to keep his promise, and the last few days he had shut himself up from morning until night, and would see no one. Sydney had undertaken the care of Dulcie, and to-day Father Ben thought would see the completion of his task.

"I don't think he has picked up properly since his illness," said Sydney. "He says he'll take a thorough rest when he has finished those idiotic jewels. Can't think what women want with such trumpery."

"Jewels to the value of some £7,000 can hardly be called *trumpery*," remarked Mr. Reid.

It was finally settled that they would leave Father Ben undisturbed until the evening, and that the Aunts, Uncle

Jack, and the two children, should come and spend the day with Mr. Reid and Sydney, and then the Aunts and Uncle Jack would make their niece's acquaintance. She was not to be told of the relation between them. Everyone agreed that that was better left for Father Ben to explain,—no doubt he would wish it himself. She was her bright, radiant, happy little self, the whole day long, and only paused in her merriment now and then to wonder how Father Ben was getting on, and to hope that he had plenty to eat. And nothing would satisfy her but that she must take him some peaches and put them in front of his door. Sydney went with her upon this little excursion. Father Ben would not trust himself to open the door even to give her a kiss. He knew he should be beguiled into wasting too much time, but waited until those dancing footsteps echoed into the far distance, then tenderly carried in the fruit she had brought him, and kissed the print of a tiny finger in the bright purple bloom of one of the ripest peaches.

The Aunts and Uncle Jack were enchanted with their little niece, as indeed they well might be. To tell the whole truth—as a story-teller should—Sydney was, as he would himself have expressed it, rather *lumpy*. He had grown very fond of little Dulcie, and it is a different thing to have a person all to yourself, or as good as all to yourself, for "the Governor" obligingly did not interfere, and then to share her company with five or six other people. But Sydney's unselfishness towards "the

Governor" had leavened his whole nature, and he could not long nurse his disappointment. Towards the afternoon the cloud cleared off, and he actually expressed his joy to Uncle Jack that Dulcie had found relations.

"It will be such a relief to Father Ben, you see," he said, "for ever since he was ill he has been thinking what was the best arrangement he could make for her in case of his death. His last plan was to write to the monks at S. Bernard's hospice, and ask them if, in case he died, they would let her live there, and take care of her until she was about twelve or so. It was a wild idea you see, and wouldn't have answered at all, at all. I dare say they are jolly old chaps, but just fancy their bringing up a girl, and all on the top of the snow. She'd be frozen to death before a winter had passed over her head. I was egging on the Governor, not that he wanted much egging on, to offer to look after her. We had Bella, you know, only she married herself off. But now you are come it's all right."

"I hope Ben won't die. Is he very ill do you think?" asked Uncle Jack anxiously.

"Oh *dear* no," said Sydney; "he's as strong as a horse *really*, only when people are ill or have been ill, they are not themselves for some time to come—they are *nervous*. And now he'll pick up before you can say 'Jack Robinson.'"

The air of wisdom and assurance with which this

young man of sixteen aired his ideas, amused Uncle Jack. But he controlled the corners of his mouth while he answered gladly enough,

"I hope you may be a true prophet, Sydney."

The sun had gone to his rest in kingly guise, his royal crimson robes of state wrapped well around him, and the shadows of evening were falling lightly over the gay city. The "good-night" of the sun brought a feeling of relief to many hearts within it. Work might be laid aside and forgotten, for that day at least, tired limbs might be stretched, weary heads might raise themselves from book or ledger, and a delightful sense of freedom succeed to the mental strain of so many hours' hard work.

Father Ben pushed aside his tools with the air of a schoolboy throwing up his lesson-books, and rising from his seat unlocked the door and began to "tidy up," as Dulcie called it. The jewels were already lying in their velvet-lined cases, safely stowed away in a box which was put into another box. This latter was made fast by a valuable Indian lock which could not be picked, and which only those who knew the secret could unfasten. A formidable box it was, bound with thick iron clamps, and a work it was to move it into Father Ben's bedroom, underneath whose bed it remained every night. The jewels were always a weight upon his mind so long as they were in his possession, but he was a grave reserved man, and none of his neighbours, not even the servant in the

house, knew the value of the work upon which he was engaged.

A sense of disappointment stole over Father Ben this evening as he slowly cleared his tools away. Dulcie was generally waiting on the stairs until the welcome sound of the turning of the key in the lock told that Father Ben was free. Then she would alight upon the landing like a bird, and be in his arms in a trice. But this evening the door stood wide open, and up stairs floated the sound of her merry laughter mingled with Sydney's voice. A sigh rose to Father Ben's lips, and chiding himself for expecting the child to be always thinking of him, he raised his eyes and started.

The doorway was filled by another figure, a well-grown sturdy boy with a sensible face upturned to his, a pair of brilliant long-lashed eyes with a steady frank look in them, and eyes that met, without the expression changing, the astonishment he knew must be expressed in his own.

The first thing he did was to *smile.* He could not help it. You might know Bors as well as possible, and see him every day, but now and again, when he came suddenly upon you, you would be overcome by the sight of that comical round head whose light brown hair stood straight on end, as if crying out,

"What is it? what is it?"

And the sensible face underneath looked so utterly unconscious that there was anything queer connected with it, that you could not help laughing. But it was

not unkind or rude to laugh, for Bors never guessed you were laughing at his hair. He would rather it had lain flat, if he had had the choice given him; but when he found it wouldn't, he did not trouble himself any more about it.

The breaking of the news to Father Ben had been entrusted to Bors, the time and place planned for him. The responsibility of the task weighed upon his mind. Here he was, and had not the least idea how to begin or what to say. No wonder, with this mighty secret burdening him, that Father Ben should marvel what made him so grave.

"What has brought you to Paris, Bors, my boy?" and Ben sat down and drew the child towards him. "I am very glad to see you again, but I hope it is no bad news that has brought you here."

"Not *bad* news," replied Bors, playing with the buttons of Father Ben's coat.

"Then *good* news?" asked Ben, smiling.

"Yes," said Bors, with a deep sigh.

"Are your Aunts with you?"

"Yes."

"Then you are on the move at last. Going to England to Uncle Jack?"

"Uncle Jack is here with us. We have been to England and back again."

"To England and back! What wonderful changes since last we met. And are you come to settle here?"

"No," said Bors, wishing he knew what to say, and

twisting one of the buttons so hard in his agitation that it broke off.

"Oh," replied Father Ben. He hardly knew what to say next. Bors's manner was so unlike his usual frank, open manner, that he could not understand it.

There was a pause. Bors was hard at work, bent upon destroying another button.

"Father Ben," he said at last, desperately, "we came to Paris to bring a message to you."

"A message to me! Bors, you are joking!"

"No, I am not." The ice was broken, and Bors grew bolder. He hesitated for a moment, and said softly,

"Father Ben, do you like stories?"

"Are you going to tell me one?" said Father Ben, smiling. "Because, if so, you must not make it a long one. Remember, I have been working hard all day, and am hungry."

"Once upon a time," said Bors, "there was a man. He was a very nice man, but some people thought he had done something wrong, and he had to go away across the sea. But before he went he wanted to send a message to somebody. Somebody was a lady. He loved her very much indeed, and he wanted to send a message that would tell her two things—that he should always love her *very, very* much indeed, and that he did not do the wrong thing that some people thought he had. He could not write her a letter, and he could not *tell* any one what he wanted to say, so he sent her

a ring which had belonged to his mother, and at the back of the ring he put in a piece of his own hair. And the ring said just what he meant it to say, for the lady knew he would not have sent her his mother's ring if he had been wicked, and the hair at the back told her how much he loved her. And the lady put the ring upon her finger and kissed it for the nice message that it had brought to her."

Bors paused to take breath. Father Ben sat as if turned to stone. Bors went on.

"The lady's name was Ethel. And afterwards she married, and she wore the ring upon her finger night and day until she died. And she had two little children, and she left the ring for the eldest of them, because he had eyes like—the man who gave it to her. And now the ring has come all the way from England to bring another message. And the message is for Father Ben, and the ring says that Uncle Jack, and Aunt Flora, and Aunt Hester are downstairs waiting to see Father Ben. And I am *so* glad," continued Bors, slipping off Ben's knee and laying the sparkling ring upon the broad hand, that trembled like a woman's when the jewel fell into its outstretched palm. "I am so very glad. You are not *Dulcie's* Father Ben any longer, but our own dear Uncle Ben, and Dulcie is our cousin. And we are all so glad. Uncle Jack says he feels a different man now he knows you are alive and not burnt or drowned in the ship which caught on fire. Oh! What a big tear. Father Ben, are you *crying?*"

Father Ben's explanations were simple enough and soon made. He had changed his mind at the last moment, and instead of starting for Australia in "The Perdita," took passage in "The Lady Helen," which sailed to America. He had not seen the friend who recognised *him*, and never for a moment imagined his family thought he met his death in that ill-fated vessel. He had not liked to write home just at first, so he wrote a few lines to the friend for whose sake he had suffered, asking him to let him know by return whether his relations believed in his guilt, or whether, in spite of appearances, they trusted him still. To this and several other letters he received no answer. After some months of dreadful anxiety he wrote to Ethel, but his letter was returned from the Dead Letter Office. He imagined from the ominous silence on every side that he must be unforgiven. Several years later he ventured to England, made guarded inquiries, but could only gain the scanty tidings that "those *who were left* had gone abroad." *Those who were left.* That painful expression almost took from Ben the courage to search further. He knew his friend was dead, but did not know his own innocence was cleared. By this time he had made a name as a skilful setter of jewels, and in all his wanderings from country to country, from city to city, he never ceased to make inquiries, but found no clue to the whereabouts of his family. At last he concluded they must have settled in one of the colonies. About eight years ago he was

sent for to Vienna. Here he fell in love with and married Dulcie's mother. They then settled in Florence, making it their head-quarters, while when Father Ben was wanted anywhere, they accompanied him upon his expeditions, always returning to Florence, where they kept on their house. When Dulcie was two years old her mother died. They had made acquaintance with Bors and Dodo by the children sheltering in their house one day when they were in Florence with Carlina and a heavy thunder-storm came on. Father Ben always concluded the Aunts' name to be the same as that of Bors and Dodo—Hardcastle. There are hundreds of Uncle Jacks in the world, and Aunt Fluff and Aunt Hessie, names the children had given them, did not recall the Florrie and Terry of his boyhood. So Bors' story had come upon him as a *great* surprise, and coming as it did at the end of a hard day's work, had quite unmanned him.

It was in the silence of midnight, and through wide deserted streets that Uncle Jack, the Aunts, and Bors, and Dodo walked back to their hotel. Well might Uncle Jack say as he patted Bors's head before he vanished into his room,

"This sort of thing would not do for *every* day, Bors, my boy."

And well might Bors make answer saucily,

"You said *that* several times before, Uncle Jack."

CHAPTER XIX.

MY LADY'S PAGE.

IF anybody—man, woman, or child—makes up his or her mind to have his or her way upon a certain point, and if they hold obstinately to it, who is to prevent them?

The Lady Rosina made up *her* mind, though she was only a beastie, to have no other rule over her than that of the gentle Violet, and when the time comes for her to go to the "happy hunting grounds," her last days will be cradled in the lap of luxury. A nice warm stall, the newest rolls, the sweetest sweeties, the fluffiest thistles, Violet's loving little hand upon her coat, everything that *can* make happy the heart of a mule will gather round the couch of the Lady Rosina, of whom even now the proverb has gone forth, flung at the head of an unruly member of a family—"You are as obstinate as a mule. Ah! you are more obstinate than that. You are as obstinate as the Lady Rosina."

And Terence had long ago made up his mind upon one point. He was to be page to the King's daughter.

The time of their return to England drew near. And matters grew serious. No coaxings, reasonings, arguments, had any effect. How could you reason with a child not "all there," as Sydney said? And how could you slip away and leave him behind, as some one else suggested, when you knew that by doing so you would snap asunder the slender thread that bound him to life?

The child was a regular worry to them. He learnt the name of the street and the number of the house where Father Ben and Dulcie lived, and if he lost his way in getting to it, he sat down upon a doorstep and waited until a policeman passed. Then he looked up into his face with shy confiding eyes, got up from the door-step, slipped his hand into that of the policeman, and said promptly,

"88, Rue Josephine."

At which address the policeman, as if he were a parcel, would deliver him. It was useless taking him home, and telling him to wait there for Tonio. If he was taken back twenty times, twenty times he would turn up again.

"How is the page to a King's daughter dressed?" he asked Tonio one day.

And Tonio, who once, while Terence was taken care of for the evening by Father Ben, had treated himself to

the theatre when the play happened to be historical, boldly launched into an account of the dress the pages there had worn.

"Could you get me one *just* the same?" was the next question.

Of what extravagance would Tonio not be guilty for his darling? What nonsense would he not encourage where Terence was concerned? The dress was bought. Terence was attired in it.

The usually quiet and retired and respectable street of Josephine waked into life one day. At the door of the "foreign gentleman with the beautiful child" stood a bewildering figure.

A fair child, whose long, light hair hung over a face so white and delicate, that every vein underneath the skin could be clearly traced. A boy with large, light blue eyes and a serious, grave face. He was dressed in a black velvet doublet slashed with pale blue, knee-breeches to match, white silk stockings, black velvet shoes, with pale blue bows and silver buckles. Ruffles of lace round sleeves and neck, a black velvet cap with silver cord and tassels, which he held in his hand. Father Ben and the whole party returning just then from a drive, could hardly believe their own eyes. Dulcie looked at the affair seriously. She liked her page's dress, she stoutly maintained, and thought he looked charming in it. Sydney, Bors, and Dodo pealed with laughter. The elders were amused and provoked, and thought

Tonio should have known better. But how expect sense from Tonio where Terence was concerned?

And the end of it was sad enough. They must take Terence with them, that was certain, and they spoke about it to Tonio. He thanked them blithely enough, but never for a moment believed that when it came to the actual starting Terence would go. Had they not been *everything* to each other? he asked. Had either of them any one else to care for them in the same way? Ah! Had not Terence been *everything* to *him*, but was he everything to Terence? He was not, though he did not realise that this fancy of Terence's meant anything but a fancy, and when they went to England and Terence found it was a choice between the two, Tonio firmly believed that the child would cling to him and let them go without him. There would be a trouble at first to comfort him for the loss of the King's daughter, but he would forget and be happy.

They all started for England together, Sydney and Mr. Reid, and Uncle Jack's party. His master gave Tonio a holiday to see them off, and he took Terence to the station. Now, as it happened, the train started punctually to the moment, and they were only all of them just in time.

"Are you coming, Terence?" asked Father Ben, quickly. "Jump in."

"No, no," cried Tonio, "you are not going," and he held him as in a vice. "Stay with me, Terence. Oh,

Terence, you are not going to leave me. You are *not.*"

The engine shrieked, Terence struggled. Tears were coming into those large, light eyes. Tonio unloosed his grasp.

"Let me go, Tonio. I am page to the King's daughter. Addio, Tonio."

And that was all. All his reward for years of patient toil and devotion. Heads were crowding the carriage window, hands and voices were giving him many farewell greetings. He saw nothing, heard nothing, saw not even Terence's face at the window, only stood motionless upon the platform as if he had been a bronze statue moulded into the perfect resemblance of a human being.

He spent the day in wandering from street to street, and later on he found himself upon the river bank. He was too stunned to think. He only knew he was alone in the world, and ten thousand times more alone than before, for now he missed the happiness he *had* known, and then, he had had no happiness to miss. Now he knew what it was to love, and *then* there had been—only himself.

And with the evening a definite purpose stole into his heart. He went to his master and asked him if he might spend the night amongst the flowers he loved so well, and which were all that were left to him. The master hesitated, looked at his face, and—consented.

And wandering among the flowers he was more himself. He laid his hot burning cheek against the cool green leaves, knelt on one knee beside them, while in the dim light, the pure, pale blossoms were upturned to listen to the story he poured into their hearts.

And as he talked, the tears which had been dried up, rained in torrents down his olive cheeks, and he wondered how great was the feeling of relief after the tears had had their way. And then he pillowed his brown head as he had been wont to pillow it, upon his arms, and went to sleep overshadowed by the splendid blossoms of a large double pink azalea.

Night and day, after that day, the flowers were his cherished companions. He talked to them, worked among them, slept among them. His master was much astonished when next pay-day came round, as Tonio, his eyes and cheeks aglow, flung, almost passionately, the money from him.

"What did he want with money?" he said, harshly, "he had food, shelter, and when his clothes were worn out his master he knew would give him more." Nor could he be persuaded to touch a single sous.

Months passed away, and as his love for the flowers increased so did his skill in arranging them. No gracefuller bouquets could anywhere be found than those which left the lithe, brown hands of Tonio. But he himself had altered much. The erect head and straight, firm, princely bearing had changed, and in their place,

his shoulders stooped, his head poked forward. His eyes were dull and sunken, his cheeks pale, his manner listless. His master did his best to cheer him, tried to rouse him to make friends, tried to interest him in something else besides his flowers, and was baffled on all sides by the utter indifference of Tonio himself.

But this could not go on much longer, and his master one day called Tonio to him and placed in his hand an envelope sealed and directed, and some money. Then he explained, as briefly as he could, for he was sorry to lose Tonio.

The letter was for a brother of his, who was a florist on a large scale near London. The money was to pay Tonio's journey, and his board and lodging when he got there. The brother would give him ample employment and good wages. "You would die in a week or two if you stayed on here," were almost his master's last words.

Of course his first step upon his arrival in England was to seek the Cramers' house. They hardly knew him, he was so altered, and when Uncle Jack wrote to his master in Paris, and heard an account of his life there, he said he did not wonder at it. And he put his altered appearance down to sleeping among the flowers, and would not hear a word to the contrary. "It was enough to have killed him outright," he said.

His value has been found out in London as in Paris

and if you want a bouquet you cannot do better than buy one of Tonio's arranging. You will find him now in the conservatory where they are sold, and you cannot fail to recognise him from my description. No one in the whole of London has such dusky, soft brown eyes, no one such a winning smile as the sunny-faced, olive-skinned Italian youth, who has regained his strength and beauty, and whose slim hands almost seem to talk as they bend stalk and leaf to work their bidding, moving the while so deftly and quickly that your eyes can hardly follow them.

Tonio leads a "civilised life," as Uncle Jack calls it. His salary, it has come to "salary" now, is a good one, and much of it goes to the Padre. His first savings, together with a grateful, happy letter, reached the poor Padre when he and his boys, or rather he, *because* of his boys, were very much down in the world indeed. They were so badly off that things were disappearing at a marvellous rate from the Padre's house, and at night he would awake from a shivering nightmare to wonder if it would come true, and if one of his boys will be found in the morning curled round under an archway and *dead*, "died from insufficient food." So Tonio's gift was doubly welcome under these circumstances, though tears came into the Padre's eyes as he read an account of the "English ladies and gentlemen," and how kind they were to Tonio. They were all in England now, Bella and Willie included, and the Padre could not help his heart aching

as he looked back upon the hands of kindness held out to him by them, and thought that if they were here now things would be brighter for his boys, and as for himself a word of sympathy, a look of encouragement would be worth the gold of Peru. And the longing grows with his years to set foot once in his life-time upon the happy English shore, for his eyes, ere yet they open to "Il Paradiso" in reality, to behold for once the type, the ideal that he has clothed in his imagination with so many beauties—because of the kindly welcome, the loving hearts he found among the only English people he ever knew.

The Reids have been talking of inviting the Padre to pay them a visit. It has even gone so far as for Sydney to ask "the Governor's" advice as to whether the Padre would feel himself insulted if upon his arrival there he found the wardrobe in the room allotted to him already stocked at least with pocket-handkerchiefs. How the knotty point was settled I do not know.

Bors went to school, and Uncle Jack's fears proved groundless. "Little Question-question," as he was nicknamed, frequently shortened to "Ques-ques," is a noted character. You often hear him quoted. He set his face from the first as a flint against untruthfulness, bullying, cheating, whether in play or lessons, anything underhand, dishonest, or mean. When brought to bay and asked his reasons, "Question-question's" answer was always the same, "GOD would not have done it, and *I*

won't." That was all, but it proved enough. "Question-question" is dauntless;—sneers, and jeers, and scoldings are alike unheeded by him, and in course of time the boys found they could *trust* him thoroughly, and they left off worrying him, and many, even boys older than he, looked up to him and were pleased to call him their "chum." New boys find him out at once, and take shelter by his side. "Question-question" has a pair of sturdy fists, and they are always at the service of the defenceless and oppressed.

When our hearts are very much set upon something, and we get it, it seldom comes to us *quite perfect.* There is always a shadow in our sunshine, which gives a feeling of disappointment we never quite get over. "There is a thorn to every rose," and the thorn to Terence's rose was—Bernard.

That noble animal never conquered his dislike to him and always regards him as an intruder. In vain "my lady" holds up her finger and shakes her head at him, Bernard leaves off for a time, but when he has another chance, behaves just as badly as ever. Until he goes to the "happy hunting grounds," and for all their sakes, for they all love him, may that time be far distant, he will never cease to open that large mouth, and give a low suppressed growl, when Terence the page appears upon the scene to render "my lady" some little service. And he will never, until powerless by old age or disease, cease to interpose his huge body between "my lady"

and her page when Terence hands her her gloves or her riding-whip. The gorgeous page's dress is put aside and used only for charades, rather to Dulcie's disgust, for "my lady" dearly loves a bit of finery.

And Sydney.

It is a dreary winter night, the wind howling as if it were mad, the rain heavily washing the windows, and the comfortable room in which two armchairs are drawn before a crackling wood fire, seems all the more cosy from the contrast with the outside world. For some minutes silence has reigned supreme, a most unnatural state of affairs so far as one of the two people is concerned, and then from the depths of the armchair nearest to the fire, a voice speaks.

"I say, Father."

"Yes, Sydney."

"I am getting on in years. In six months I shall be seventeen. Have you ever thought *what I am to be?*"

"Yes, I have: thought of it over and over again, and dreaded when you would yourself ask me. I cannot bear to give you up, Sydney."

"No one ever dreamed of such a thing," said Sydney calmly. "I've chosen a profession where I shall stick to you—like sealingwax."

"What is that?" eagerly asked Mr. Reid.

"A *doctor*. It occurs to me that I am as good as one already."

I warned you before that though Sydney is a great favourite of mine, you cannot make him into a hero. He is wanting in heroic qualities, modesty being one of those. He is no hero—only just a boy.

"It's a great relief to me," said Mr. Reid, drawing a deep breath.

"Now, Father, what did you mean by *worrying* over it? You might have known I should never leave you. You couldn't get on without me."

"I am sure I could not," said Mr. Reid meekly.

Another silence, and Sydney's voice spoke again. This time I give him credit for a *little* diffidence in tone and manner.

"You would not object to my getting *married*, I suppose?"

"*Married!* Sydney, how old are you?"

"Nearly seventeen," spoke Sydney, unblushingly.

"*Seventeen!* There is plenty of time in ten or fifteen years to think of marrying."

"Not when you have some one in your eye, Father. What do you say to *Dulcie*?"

"Worse and worse! Oh, Sydney! Why she is a mere *baby*."

"She will be grown up by the time I want to marry her," said Sydney. "Why it seems to have taken your breath away, Father. I mentioned it, because, you see, it steadies a fellow, having some one in his eye. And now I can have my evenings at home, in a quiet,

bachelor way, instead of tacking myself on to ladies' petticoats at parties, to see which is the best of them, or which isn't. If you look at it from a rational point of view, you will see it is the best thing I could do. You wouldn't care for me to dress myself up to look like a waiter, and tear about from party to party, would you?"

"No," said Mr. Reid.

"Of course not," said Sydney, cheerfully. "And now that that is settled I feel happier. When you have finished your cigar, we'll have our game of bézique, and you shall give me my revenge."

The wood burned itself into white embers, but Sydney did not, as was usually the case, jump up to replenish it. Mr. Reid thoughtfully, and with an amused smile, smoked his cigar to the last bit, but still Sydney did not move. His hands were deep down in his pockets, his eyes were fixed upon the caverns in the fire.

"I shall have Tonio to the wedding," he said suddenly. "He is a splendid fellow. Ah! by the bye, I shall give him the order for the bride's bouquet. It will have to be—"

"Sydney," interrupted Mr. Reid, rather drily, "what do you think about ordering the wedding-cake *to-morrow?*"

"*Think*," said Sydney laughing, and briskly bestirring himself to arrange a small table where Mr. Reid could play his bézique in his armchair comfortably, "why I

know what I *think*,—I think you are the best, the *very* best Father there ever was; and if I had had any other but you, I should do what the cabbies are doing at this present time, I should—*strike*."

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